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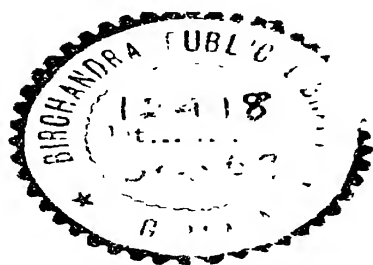
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NIGHT

NIGHT

FRANCIS POLLINI



LONDON

JOHN CALDER

IN ASSOCIATION WITH OLYMPIA PRESS

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For
L.S.

All of the characters in this book are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

1

WHAT was left of the company surrendered. The Chinese had overrun the entire area. Dead and dying lay all around. In one swift swoop they had come, smacking hard at the centre, and then fanning out, enveloping the flanks. Out of the night they had come. The bugles had blown...

The wounded cried.

The stink and sting of burnt powder fused with the night air, and, slowly, faded away with it.

A new day was born...

A raw whisper, "Don't any of 'em speak English?"

A quick answer, muttered, "I dunno. Lookit that one. Goin' ape."

The Chinese soldiers, six of them, were having a conference. They seemed to be deciding whether to shoot the prisoners or take them in, turn them over to an officer.

He thought this, looking at them. They were gesticulating and chattering like monkeys. He wondered how any of them could hear what any other was saying. The chattering became ever more intense.

And he thought: These, then, are the men who come and come and come, in the night, never hesitating, against greater firepower, heedless of losses, seeing only the objective. A voice

in his head said, distinctly: Just like my men. Bitterly. The shame of it gripped him, hurting him. He could still see the forward squads flying past him, in complete panic, holes abandoned, machine-guns ice-cold; at first sound of the enemy, there, in the night, coming up on them, towards them...

An inane giggle, "Hee hee hee—lookit them—ever see such scroungy bastards?"

He wanted to tell him—but held up. No one answered. Just a great deal of shuffling of feet.

"Like a bunch of monkeys," the man continued.

He wanted to tell him, but checked himself once more, thinking: the guy's a fool. In the next moment, in any event, someone said it for him.

"Wise up, dog-ears. Those 'monkeys' just beat the shit out of us."

A long while they were silent, some even turning away now from the clatter before them.

Now, he couldn't help smiling. He thought: they really are funny, big and small Charlie Chaplins, and what the hell are they talking about? If you call that talk...

Someone said, "Good ol' Truman, good ol' boy."

A rough voice said, "Awright, knock it off, fungo."

"Good ol' boy, buddy boy. I oughta make a record a this and send it to him. Good ol' -"

"Look, knock it off!"

"Hey, look, for Christ's sake!"

One of them was waving his rifle in the air now, cackling furiously, finally slamming it to the ground and jumping up and down on it. Then one of the group suddenly turned and struck him on the head with his rifle butt. He sprawled to the ground near his rifle, and lay quite still, a long while.

"Boy, that's great," a man near him said. "They do that to each other—huh—what sort of little deals they got for us, huh?"

The little group of prisoners stirred.

Brian, one of the younger ones, was shaking. It began suddenly, his whole body pulling and jerking. He stammered out, "Boy, I think they're gonna shoot us!"

Moriarity, a sergeant, said, "Take it easy. You can't tell. Someone's pullin' for us."

"Yeh, but he just got clobbered!" Brian answered.

"How do you know he's the one?" Marty said.

"Oh, boy, he's a peach," said a man at his elbow.

Moriarity turned to him. "What's your name?"

"Sam."

"Sam?"

"Sam Marine."

"When'd you get here?"

"Yesterday."

"How come I never seen you?"

"Christ, I dunno."

"Don't Christ me, buddy."

"Well, I dunno, Sarge, honest."

"That's a hell of a note. What you been doin'?"

"Nothin'."

"Nothin'?"

"Well, I didn't get no orders."

"Jesus Christ! Hey, Marty—"

"Yeh, yeh," Marty said, sighing wearily.

"If they only knew, if the Chinks only knew—"

"They know."

"Marine—"

"Yeh, Sarge?"

"Stay cool—"

"Don't worry, I will—"

"If they shoot, don't fall over—capisce? *Dōn't!* That's an order!"

"Don't worry, I—"

"Don't let those little ol' bullets kid you—they Can't Hurt

You - 'specially if they get you in the fuckin' head, buddy!"

"Don't worry, I—" Marine started to answer, but lapsed into a strange silence, thinking

"How's that?" he said, at last.

Now the Chinese were gesticulating and quarrelling so violently that it seemed to him they might solve the problem by knocking one another off. In which case, he thought, the remnants of Baker will shag ass and beat their way back to their lines—if there still were lines—

"I'll be a sonuvabitch," someone murmured.

"You will be before this ball is over, buddy."

"Cheerful fucker, ain't you?"

"Well, what the hell you expect? Wise up, dumbass."

Marty said. "Look, you want us start too?"

They laughed, and turned their attention back to the wildly screaming Chinese, who apparently as yet had decided nothing. The one on the ground was regaining consciousness. His head was bleeding badly. He turned over, slowly, groaning, sat up, and cast a dull, uncomprehending gaze at the prisoners. He reached for his rifle, unsteadily, and dragged it to him, dropping it across his lap. He sat there, staring.

Finally, a snappy officer strolled up the road. He had heard the din and with a few of his men was coming up to investigate. So furiously were the captors shouting and arguing that they didn't see him, nor hear him when he shouted, until, angrily, he drew his pistol and discharged it into the air. They swung around sharply and faced him, aghast, coming to attention quickly, two of them adding a little bow. The one on the ground did not move at all, only sat there, staring at the prisoners.

The officer began a devastating tirade. The soldiers seemed to wither before him. Then he moved up to them and struck them in the face, one by one, again and again. His voice was high, and as he raved hit all the notes on the scale. He turned his attention to the fallen man by dealing him a consoling

kick which sent him rolling at least ten feet, rifle and all.

"The ol' boy's sure gettin' the shit kicked outa him today," Moriarity whispered.

"Today is *not* his day," Kowatski said.

"He shoulda stood in bed," someone rasped.

A muffled laughter went through all of them.

Soon silenced. Jackson was saying, "Oh, oh, here comes sonny boy sunshine in person, gango."

In fact, it was the officer, through with his reprimand at last, coming towards them. He assumed a haughty posture, then a contemptuous posture, then a triumphant posture, then a disgusted posture. He walked all around them, occasionally snorting, hawking, spitting. Finally, he came to a halt before them.

"Whaddya offer for the whole lot, buddy?" someone said.

"I heard that!" the officer screamed, "you men not only stinking lousy soldiers but wise guys, huh? Yeh, Wise Guys, you think Chinese ignorant, not able speak English, ha! We know, We speak—what you think? And how, plenty, I speak—understand All—The Works!"

"Hurray!" Moriarity said.

"You son of bitch!" shrieked the officer, rushing at him, knocking him down, kicking him.

"Big deal!" gasped Moriarity.

"Shut up! Shut up! When Chinese officer speak, shut up, only listen, dirty wise guy!"

"Hurray! Terrific!" Moriarity applauded.

The officer called his men over, and with their aid kicked him unconscious.

Brian was trembling violently now. Marine, near him, said, "Steady, man, steady. Play it cool. Know what I mean? Those guys can't hurt you. Think about that, man, think."

Brian trembled more violently.

They dragged Moriarity to the front of the group and let him

lie there, crumpled in a heap, bleeding. The officer resumed his speech.

"So now see what happen to Insubordinate Swine when Chinese Officer speak and he interrupt. We in charge. We, We Chinese! Got that? Hear? Well, listen—You—"

He walked up to the man in front of him.

"YOU HEAR?" he hurled in his face.

The man, Kowatski, said, "I ain't deaf, buddy."

The officer hit him across the face with his pistol. Kowatski cried out and staggered, but did not fall.

"Tough guy? C'mon, what you say? What you say when Chinese officer talk? What you say, tough guy?"

"I ain't deaf, shitpot," gasped Kowatski.

The pistol smashed into his face again, and he fell this time.

The men stirred, and began protesting loudly, an electric shock gone through them.

"Hey—hold on—we ain't crooks—prisoners a war—POWs—you understand that? Jerk?" Jackson screamed.

The officer screeched, "SILENCE!"

"Silence my ass! You can't do that, buddy! You know the fuckin' rules!"

"Rules, *rules*, you bastard!"

It became a mass roar.

The officer whirled, issuing orders to the men who had just arrived from the road.

They surrounded the little group. Most were armed with tommy-guns, the rest with an assortment of rifles, pistols, strange-looking grenades. Bayonets fixed. The officer screeched and cackled, completely hysterical now. He ran around the circle, wildly triumphant, waving his pistol.

"You see, you see! Stupid fools! *Prisoners!* You prisoners! and if I want—I shoot—*shoot!* Shoot you all—all of you—See—Presto Bango—I shoot all!"

Brian screamed, "The sonuvabitch's apeshit! *Apeshit!*"

Lemme outa here! He's gonna—we're—"

He was bolting, but Franco grabbed him. "Shut up! Shut your goddamn mouth!"

The officer was whooping, jumping crazily up and down, slapping his heels as they kicked behind him in the air.

This matches any vaudeville act of the Twenties, Marty thought; but then, what the hell do I know of the Twenties?

He whispered to Jackson, "What a show!"

"What rank is he?"

"Hell, at least a general."

"That's what I figure, Mart, hell, we're in for it now."

The officer gradually unwound, calmed down, and finally stopped, panting heavily. He waved his pistol a few more times, feebly, then put it away.

... Sweet Jesus, what talent, what talent ...

After a while, still gasping for breath, the officer issued new orders, first to his men, then the prisoners.

"Now, wise guys, we go. WE GO! Everybody up. UP! Anybody not get up, We shoot! Understood?"

The men dragged Moriarity and Kowatsky to their feet and struggled to bring them back to consciousness.

"Leave them! They not walk!" said the officer, once again screeching.

Once again the men protested.

Marty said to him, "Relax, we'll carry them. Don't worry about it."

"No!" came the shriek of an answer.

"Yes! We got the right! It's in the law, you know the law, the rules? You know it?"

And then the individual voices were lost in the chorus that soon swelled, enveloping the officer, his men ...

He gave in, at last, and the group moved off, flanked on all sides by weapons. It was September. The sun, just rising, would be lovely, and warm ...

By evening they reached a Headquarters unit, and they were handed over. The officer bade them farewell with a little speech about the forthcoming Great Chinese Victory, and the Liberation of All Korean Peoples.

They passed the night there, and the next day. Then, that evening just after sunset, they were started on the march north.

The men from Baker Company were still together. As the days passed, they picked up others who had belonged to it. They had not been seen since the attack.

Moriarity and Kowatski were having a bad time of it. They had been severely battered, and their injuries, unattended, caused great pain and trouble . . .

There was no frolicking with their captors now. The men did as they were told.

The weariness crept up on them, got inside them, and weighed heavily. Sometimes at night (they always marched at night) they covered as many as fifteen miles. The road was hard, hewn out of rock, and smooth as a washboard. When some fell behind, the guards urged them on.

"Quiggly! Quiggly!" said a few, in their best English.

Towards dawn they would stop, and if, near a village, the guards allowed them to sleep. The moment they halted, they collapsed in a heap, some asleep even before hitting the ground. The guards would go to the village and get themselves something to eat. And the prisoners slept, anywhere, wherever they had fallen . . .

The guards kicked at those who had fallen on the road, trying to get them to move to the sides. No response. At last, the guards, heaving, swearing, dragged them there. The road was clear . . .

Later in the day, some pails of boiled millet were brought for

them. They ate it greedily . . .

They had not been allowed to wash. Lice began to crawl.

Kowatski muttered, "Boy, you stink."

"Think so?" Jackson answered.

"Yeh, buddy, you stink like shit."

"Goddamn, what you think you stink like?"

"Shit."

"That's right."

"But I can only smell yours. How come?"

"How the hell do I know?"

Marty had finished his millet. He smacked his lips.

"That really hit the spot. Makes me feel like a bird. Want me to warble?"

"Good stuff, huh, Sarge?"

"Listen, buddy, just be goddamn glad the Gooks didn't nail us," Moriarity said.

They had passed many bodies of GIs, hands tied behind their backs, neat holes in their heads, lying in ditches alongside the road. They had been taken by North Korean troops.

Brian murmured, "I guess we're pretty lucky."

"We'll find out," Moriarity said. His face had started to heal.

Kowatski muttered, "Ain't they sweet!"

"Your face is a mess. That nose busted?"

"Think so."

"Hurt bad?"

"Damn right."

"Well, take it easy, buddy, it's useless, ya know, they got us by the short ones."

"The short ones— Boy, I'd sure like to meet that bastard again— some day—"

"Maybe you will. It's a small world. Lookit all the jokers we picked up the last couple days. Ever think you'd see them again?"

"Jesus, we got the short end."

"Well, yeh, maybe. So what? Somebody decided they weren't there. But they were. Then somebody decided we hold. And we didn't. Anyhow, those machine-gunners coulda won a hundred yard race. There's your short end, buddy. Who got it? I dunno. We got something. This is the limit . . ."

"Wait a minute. I wonder about that."

"You wanta get back, dontcha?"

"Ha!"

"Well, what the hell, we got a pretty good chance—better'n before, anyhow—"

Marty said to Kowatski, "How you doin', boy?"

The man made a face. "What is this crap they been feedin' us?"

"Some kind of grain. Millet, I think."

"It's for the birds."

They were smiling.

"You're so right! Man, they really go for it. And look how healthy they are! What the hell you bitchin' about?" Jackson said.

"You stink. Oh, Jesus you stink. Can't you take a bath? Why don't you take a bath?"

"Shower, that's what he needs, shower."

They were laughing, for a moment.

Night fell. They moved off again. It had started to rain . . .

The fifteenth night of the march was ending. Dawn returned slowly, gently pushing darkness aside. Now the men rolled and staggered off the road.

But this time the guards would not allow sleep, or what passed for it now, in the fever of their exhaustion. These were fresh guards, and they moved spiritedly among the prisoners, chattering, cackling, each minute more excitedly, prodding with rifle butts, kicking, pulling them onto their feet.

Moriarity gasped, "Hey—sleep—we sleep now—hey—you

guys—hey?”

“No! No! No!” screamed one of the guards. “Quiggly, Go!”

“What the hell for? Airplanes come, BOOM BOOM, blow goddamn hell outa everything—you—us—hey—what the hell for?” and he was moving his hands to simulate an aircraft coming in to attack.

The guard replied, “Go, Go!” moving his arms up and around and down, then pointing before him.

And they saw there, in the distance, a cluster of buildings becoming clearer as dawn gave way more and more to early morning light.

They were standing, and silent, all of a sudden.

At last Kowatski rasped, “Jesus, are we there? Are we?”

“Siberia,” someone mumbled.

The sight seemed to kindle a new spark of life in the men. Some sort of goal attained. The long nights would be ending, and the drugged blackness into which they fell, each dawn . . .

“Hey—home sweet home—looks like—boy oh boy,” Jackson was mumbling, barely able to keep his feet, stumbling, recovering, stumbling again.

Nobody else said anything. In the early dawn only the dragging, shuffling feet, some now without shoes, could be heard. A few men looked up briefly to see what it was they were approaching. The heads fell again quickly, seeing only the ground, if that, for many actually walked asleep.

When they were about a quarter of a mile from the place (though some who looked at it long enough already called it “camp”) a roaring and spluttering and rattling and clanking could be heard coming up behind them. It was a truck. The guards scurried out and waved their arms and screamed. It looked as if the truck would plough right into them. But at the last moment, somehow, it ground to a screeching, cantankerous stop, and it seemed as if it would fall all apart, utterly, pieces scattering and falling in a heap, clinking, clanking. The men, at the very last

moment, rolled and tumbled out of its way, falling into ditches off the road in heaps of six and seven, guards, prisoners, and whatever, all tangled up.

It woke them up. And when the shock wore off, a grin weaved its way through them. But it missed the guards, who now struggled to disentangle themselves, regain their dignity, screaming, screeching orders . . .

Moriarity, in a voice that sounded like a rusty file scraping against a cheese-grater, said, "I'll be a sonuvabitch."

And now, rocking to and fro on legs that were made of rubber, filthy, hungry, beyond stupor, they began to laugh. It started as a ghostly chuckle, probably from Moriarity, who stood there like a spectre with his broken face, staring, and it seemed to spread to Jackson, Marty, Kowatski, and so on, until they were all part of it, until it was a mass chorus of ironic laughter, almost inhuman, as if from the dead themselves, uncontrollable, coming from the very depths of them; it was impossible to tell after a while whether it was moaning or laughter. No such sound had ever been heard by the guards, nor, for that matter, the prisoners, and it went on and on. The guards stared, standing perfectly still, staring as if at devils suddenly emerged from the earth. It never varied in pitch or tone, just a steady, ghastly sound, not very loud, but from the bowels of Hell itself.

The guards finally became frightened just standing still and doing nothing. They leaped into action, swinging rifle butts, pushing, screaming, pulling, kicking, trying to herd them into the back of the truck, standing there, forlornly, more or less in one piece, its purpose at last clear.

Somehow, they managed to do it. A rifle poke here, a butt there, a kick, a punch, a shove . . . As soon as they made it, the men dropped like sacks of potatoes, which, in fact, they did share the back with. They were too far gone to notice. Moriarity did mumble, just before falling, "Jesus, there's other guys too, ~~Mart~~."

They were all asleep immediately, sprawled over one another.

like a box of matches fallen all over the floor.

Now, abruptly, there was a violent explosion, followed by four or five others, less loud, then a mixture of gasps and wheezes and rattlings, machine-gun-like bursts, and bleatings . . . The truck was starting up.

A few of them raised their heads. But no sound came from them. Deep sleep took them, even in that jolting, leaping vehicle clanking its way over the appalling road . . .

When they arrived at the "camp," they were dislodged from the truck, with great difficulty. A number of people were there to greet them. Officers, or, at least, NCOs. They wanted to interrogate, but it was futile, for the men were asleep on their feet, and soon fell over, all in a heap. Attempts to awaken them were abandoned. They were dragged into one of the huts, already containing some fifteen or twenty men . . .

. . . she was standing there. Some tears lay in her eyes. Marty looked up at her . . .

"Hey—Sarge hey-- "

Somebody was bending over him . . . a gruff voice enveloping him, or what in that moment passed for him . . .

"My name's Jolson."

He wanted to scream, peals of laughter were tugging within him. He mumbled, "Sing us a song, Al."

"Pretty funny, pretty funny. Know how long you been sleeping?"

"Why did you wake me up?"

"You don't wanta eat?"

"More swill?"

"They wanta see you anyhow."

"Who?"

Jolson eyed him.

"Man, listen: you're in a POW camp—you just came in—in"

name's Jolson, man—"

"I know. Sing us a song."

"Geez, I shoulda letcha sleep!"

Marty grinned. He tried to move. He groaned. It was all clear to him now.

"Where's the chow? Where can I wash? I'm lousy."

"Think nothin' of it. It's permanen."

"Well, anyway, where can I wash?"

Jolson waved his hand.

"Over there, buddy—outside."

"Thanks."

After several attempts, and Jolson's help, he got up.

"Jesus!"

"Rocky boat, huh, buddy?"

"Rocky, oh, rocky—how you like it here, Al?"

"Joe's the name."

"Jesus—Joe Jolson—"

"Whatsamatter?"

"How you like it here, Joe?"

"Whatsamatter?"

"Joesy, boy, how you like it here?"

"Well—" Long pause, eyeing him. "I'll tell ya—great place --oh, man, great—hey, dig it: they're gonna send us to school now!"

"School? No foolin'. Joe? Christ, you and me -- we be teacher's pet, no, Joe?"

"Hey—" eyeing him again, "you think I fool you?"

"What for?"

"I don't kid—they're gonna do it—"

"What for? Learn Chinese?"

"I dunno. Wobbly Nose told us yesterday."

"Did he?"

"Yeh. Sure did."

"And who in hell's he?"

"Greatest cat—hee hee—hey man, dig it: Education Officer, know it?"

His head was spinning. All was unhinging. He pulled at himself. Fiercely . . .

"Hey!"

"Me?"

"What time of day is it?"

Jolson shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? Maybe four o'clock."

And he ambled off somewhere. Marty went off to wash. When he returned, Jolson was there with a bucketful of cooked millet. Marty plunged into it and polished it off. Then he slumped onto his mat.

"Who are these other birds?" he mumbled.

Jolson yawned. "Don't know most of 'em myself."

"GIs?"

"Guess so."

"We here for good in this hut?"

He looked around. He could see no one he knew.

"I dunno, man. They just threw you in here when you first came with that bunch yesterday."

"Where are they?"

"All over the place, I guess."

"How long you been here?"

"Three months—I think—"

"In this hut?"

"One month. I was in another camp."

Long silence.

"Where the hell are we anyhow, Joe?"

"Near the Yalu—China's just over there, man." •

Marty whistled. "Boy, that's a way—one job getting out, huh?"

Jolson was laughing. "You kiddin'? Nobody, but *nobody* makes it, ol' buddy!"

"They try?"

"Sure, hell yes they try! They try anything!"

"You tried?"

"Christ, man, NO! What for? Hopeless. They got us by the mostest. Listen, first they can spot one of us a mile off. We just don't LOOK like them, man, NOHOW! Second, ya have to go through the villages—unless ya wanta go up and down five thousand hills, with nothin' but rock on them. There ya are: nailed. I seen a dozen go and I seen a dozen brought back. Buddy, this is it. but IT, let's face, we're here till it blows -"

Another long silence.

"Well, my name's Marty."

"Shake, buddy, and this place here's Chongson, or some such shitten thing like that."

"They let you write letters?"

"Don't think so."

"You tried?"

"Don't think so."

Marty let it go at that.

"Yessir, way up north, in the land of---honey---" Jolson was mumbling.

Marty sat up after a while. He felt better, the rough wash and millet had done something for him. He looked around. He saw the hut was rectangular, made from wood and mud, and sprawled here and there, all over, were twenty or thirty men. In one corner, a group of eight or ten huddled close together, practically tangled up in each other.

"Joe—hey, Joe—"

"Yeh, buddy?"

"Any officers around here?"

Jolson laughed. "Took 'em away, man. Were here couple weeks. Guys gave 'em rough time, though, lemme tell ya."

"Rough time, Joe?"

"Yeh, buddy."

"What you mean?"

"Hell, you know—"

"No. I don't—"

"Jesus, buddy, just wouldn't do what they said—"

"You kidding?"

"Hey—listen—wise up—man—"

He sat up, staring right at Marty.

"This is POW land. man—dig that "

"So what, Joe?"—quietly.

Joe, puzzled, "So—no rules here--what you think, hey--no rank here—what's rank here? Who cares for rank here?"

"If not here, Joe—then where? I'd say here more than anywhere."

After a while Jolson said, "Boy, you sure got some surprises comin', oh man, are they comin'!"

Marty pointed to the men in the corner.

"What's wrong with those guys?"

He noticed that some of the hut's occupants were beginning to pay some attention to him now. They looked him over languidly, but with a certain contempt, like poolroom hangers-on.

"Sick," said Jolson.

"Where's the hospital?"

"Come on, man, don't shit me."

"I'm not Joc. Where is it?"

"Look, now, look, man: they got a sort of a place---Jesus, you're filled with questions—you a cop? Hee, hee, hee "

Marty checked himself with great difficulty.

"What about the hospital, Jolson?"

The man eyed him.

"Stickin' hole. What goes in comes out stiff, guaranteed We put 22 under last week," he said, finally.

"What rank are these guys?"

"Keeerist, rank!" came the answer, drowning in peals of laughter

Marty could no longer control it, and he roared at the man, "Stand up!"

The man babbled and spluttered, wallowing in his laughter, looking now and again at the man before him; gradually the laughter retreated and an inane mask of innocence came over his face. Soon, he was quiet. He didn't stand up, though, only looked long at the man before him, who now moved towards him, in on him.

"Stand up!"

Jolson stared fixedly at the face of the man over him. He was frightened, but he *knew*. There was something he *knew*: if I can get to them, if I can find the way . . . Soon, he did, his gaze left the face before him, wandered across the room, and found those who had heard, had seen, had stood there, or sprawled there, wondering, waiting, and now, catching the appeal rising to it. . . .

And Marty heard it, the murmuring behind him, to the side of him, rising slowly to a cacophonous rumbling in the moment that hovered and fixed him and the man before him.

"Lay off, Sarge."

"Easy, boy, easy."

Drawling voices, southern flower voices . . .

He was sick.

"Let 'em alone, boy, what you doin'? Let 'em alone."

The twang of Texas, Colorado . . .

"You better lay off, buddy."

Streets of dear New York . . .

"Relax, man, relax."

Boston's own broad tones . . .

Ugly, bearded, filthy men, who had apparently been sprawling there for days, not even taking care of themselves, yet now up on their feet, dragging their way towards him, heavy and dull, the hot violence within them boiling, now drawing up before him, to the sides of him, behind him, forming a circle . . .

"We don't wanta have any of that kinda stuff here, Sarge, not in this here hut," said one of them, a redhead and Brooklynese.

"You kin play sojer when ya git back, buddy!" from the hills of Kentucky, black-haired, filthy, staring as if drugged.

"Just relax, Sargie, we're doin' alright, see?" from one directly before him, short, mouse-faced, stateless.

The circle was closing in. It increased in numbers, more men suddenly coming to life from all parts of the hut, seeming to have sprung out of the floor. At last, the only ones not in the circle were the very sick, who lay in a tangled heap in the far corner. Fear was mounting within him. He looked all about, and could see but ugly gargoyle faces. His heart was pounding. Here and there he thought he saw faces in which some life still flowed. The sight of these (real or imagined) helped form the words which now were tumbling out of him, somehow breaking through the fear upon him.

"What the hell is this? You American troops or what? Huh? You answer that, red-head! You're POWs—soldiers—you know that? Anybody tell you that? Not crooks or murderers sent up for a stretch—you realize that? What the hell is this? C'mon, get the lead out! For Christ's sake!"

Silence. Absolute. Even their breathing came to him, ugly, stuporous breathing, telling him . . . There began a dreadful sound, monotonous, soft, contemptuous, starting (he was aware) behind him, spreading like a flame through gasoline, around the circle, through all of them . . .

The Brooklynese: "Fuck, Sarge, go take a *fuck!* We ain't interested. *Peddle your wares elsewhere!* Blow! Lay off! Right, you guys?"

Brief pause in the awful noise. Hope within him. Soon shattered, for it took up again, gradually growing louder, clearer, words fashioning themselves out of the sound.

He fought the panic taking him by shouting, "You guys are hangin' yourselves!"

The drawl: "Let 'em prove it, buddy!"

Boston: "Just lay off, boy blue, just that!"

Ever tighter grew the circle . . . waves rushed forward, taking him . . . he must do something . . . he wondered what . . . a voice was screaming . . . a voice within was screaming . . .

But also, *out there*. A guard, accompanied by what seemed to be an officer. They screamed a few more orders. The circle wavered, and soon dissolved. The men shuffled back to their corners.

He was sick, weak, cold rivers were running through him.

"Come with us." A voice.

He stared at them.

"You have belongings?"

"No."

"O.K. Come with us."

A chorus of voices now, as he was leaving the building:

"So long, Sarge!"

"Keep pluggin' for ol' Uncle Harry, buddy!"

"Give 'em hell, Sarge, remember the red white and blue "

And laughter, much laughter . . .

THE room was small, and stuffy. Tobacco smoke was heavy in the air. He wished a window could be opened. At a desk before him sat a man in a plain uniform. It had no markings or insignia of any kind. He was of medium build, his face seemed young, but Marty knew he could have been anywhere between twenty and forty. A studious face, ascetic, almost forlorn. A priest. He remembered a priest he once knew . . . He used to come around the house, looking for money, trying to get them to go church. Sometimes his mother went. But he and his father used to argue with him about the uselessness of religion . . . did God create flies? mosquitoes? . . . There was the time he and his father and his sister had gone to his office after his mother had . . . He was very sad thinking of this . . . he stopped it . . . but the memory returned . . . In the office of the new church they had put up . . . there he had told them . . .

"First, you will fill out this form."

The voice was gentle, and spoke American. He was delighted. He tried to place the accent. Northeast . . . but where?

The man smoked constantly. Marty noticed a revolver. It rested there, on a corner of the desk, easily overlooked if you weren't too observant . . .

He looked at the form. It was a personal history questionnaire. The heading was "International Red Cross". He looked up. The man's eyes were upon him, so concerned, so patient. He started to fill in the form. He felt the man watching him. Waiting. Smoking.

At last, it was completed.

"O.K.," said the Chinese, taking the form. He perused it casually. "You slept a long time, eh? You must have had a hard journey. Hmm. Well, you can relax now. You're among

friends here. Yes. Hmmm. Pennsylvania, eh? Interesting. I have friends there. At your state university—history department—you know it? Yes, I see—Yes . . . father retired—retired what?” He looked up. Kindly eyes.

Marty hesitated. But finally said, “Coal miner.”

He returned to the form. “Oh, yes, of course, I see now—mother—deceased—hmmm—yes—”

He studied the rest in silence, and then laid it aside. Puffing long on his cigarette, he blew the smoke away from Marty, and then turned to him, saying nothing for long moments, only looking.

The cigarette was out. He had smoked it until it nearly burned his lips, then laid it carefully in an ashtray, without crushing it, letting it burn itself away, slowly.

Suddenly, but very quietly, he said: “We will see that the Red Cross gets this and notifies your people. Now, be perfectly frank with me, do you have any complaints?”

Marty smiled.

. . . my friend . . .

The man went on. “I see you think that is amusing. O.K. You may smile. I don’t stop you. We have what is known as the Lenient Policy in all of our camps. We are not savages. We believe in the mind and have respect for it, especially that of another’s. In spite of all the errors that mind may contain, mark you. You see? We care for all minds. We do not discriminate. We are not Germans. This is no concentration camp. You were in Hut Number 4. That is a bad hut. Are there many such people in your army? I feel sorry for them. I feel sorry for your army. I wonder, though. I can hardly believe that. I would imagine most are like you. I can see you are a good man, sincere, relatively sound—not rotten, like Number 4. You are misguided, though. Terribly. That is the trouble with most of your people. But of course, there must be a certain percentage—perhaps high—I don’t know—like Number 4; Rotten, thor-

oughly rotten, beyond any hope, I'm so sorry to say. Never mind, next week they will all be dead . . .

"You think I am cruel to say that? Did I not just tell you we are not savages, Germans? You will see, in time, what I mean. You will see I am right. Even now you know that I am right. Rotten to the core, nothing can touch them. We can do nothing. They are dead even now. Dead, dead, dead. It is just a question of their bodies, now, getting sick and dying. And that will happen. Next week, mark my word. Perhaps we should send them back to your lines. In fact, in a number of cases, we have done so. But that is not for me to decide. I'm all in favour of it, but it is not for me to decide. It is not in my hands. I would send them back at once. Of what use are they? To us or to you. You can have them, with pleasure. They guarantee the victory of our armies. Still, I must say, it is sad to see men in that state. Men. Ha! They don't care about anything. They need nourishment badly—and yet they throw out the soyabeans we give them—imagine, what a luxury up here! Even for us! Very, very sad. The last stages of capitalistic-bourgeois rottenness taking its course. Floating them to the sewers, human flotsam. They die in the sewer. But we will take *you* out of there, very soon. We will put you in a good hut where the men want to learn, where their characters are intact, sound, and the only thing needed is proper guidance. Your mind will be straightened out, you will gain insight, real understanding. Remember this: in our eyes you are not a Prisoner of War; you are a Liberated Man. You are here primarily to learn. We shall teach you, show you the Good Daily Life, as exemplified by our Lenient Policy. When did you last eat?"

"A while ago."

"In the hut?"

"Yes."

Pause.

"What was it?"

"Bird seed."

Sigh.

"Yes, that's all they're good for. You will eat better—later. Have you tobacco?"

"No."

"You will have some soon. Everything will be arranged. We are not savages. Remember that. We are highly civilized. Highly. You will see."

Silence.

Finally, "Can I write a letter?"

Brightly, "Certainly—why not? But—later. For now, go. The soldier will show you your new quarters, give you supplies, clothing. Call me Ching." And he extended his hand. Marty found himself taking it, shaking it. Warm hand. Then, in the next moment, he felt foolish, wondering why he had. He turned away abruptly.

Ching was calling the guard. Rattling off instructions in his own tongue. Then Marty heard him say, "See you later."

He did not answer. The guard urged him out. He glanced up momentarily to look back. The face of Ching. Sad-faced Ching . . . *What is it all about? Trickery, no doubt, no doubt at all, reeks of it, the payoff later . . .* But deep inside he felt a certain ease, relief . . . *He didn't beat me up . . . or push me around . . .*

He was grateful.

And now to find out what they wanted . . . *And that will end it.*

His spirits fell, swiftly, suddenly . . . But he was hoping, a tiny spark flickering, momentarily, then --faltering, disappearing—a great part of him knowing. He felt at the edge of a huge ocean in the night, about to be engulfed by both . . . taking him where in his whole life he had never quite been . . . to where, he sensed suddenly very cold within—lay disaster . . .

4

HE was marched along. He studied the layout of the camp. There were some thirty or forty huts, some large, some very small. He didn't see a fence of any kind, but he knew that the nature of the country itself was the best fence any camp could have. There were a few guards here and there, at strategic points. Now it occurred to him: this had been a village. Its inhabitants had been evacuated. Where? Where in the name of God? He felt sorry for them. They may even have been among the great streams of human misery which choked the roads before the advancing armies, first one way, then the other, carrying what belongings they had on their backs, and their babies . . .

They stopped at one of the larger buildings. He was given some clothing, a straw mat, blankets, and tobacco. When they had walked almost the entire length of the camp, the guard stopped before a hut and signalled him to enter.

"Quiggly! Quiggly!"

The hut was smaller, much smaller than the one he had been in at first, and there were only ten or twelve men in it. But they weren't just sitting there. They were doing things. There were signs of life.

"Lookit! Lookit!" someone said.

"Holy smoke! Come on in, buddy, come on in—"

Moriarity Jackson. He was so happy to see them. He greeted them like long-lost brothers. They were thumping one another on the back, shouting gleefully, laughing. They looked so peculiar in the Chinese clothing.

"I thought I'd seen the last of you two ugly bastards!"

Moriarity: "How goes it? You like it here?"

"Love it man! The greatest. What a honeymoon spot! Slept

like a log for two days, they tell me. Goes to show you. What you laughin' at? Jesus, what characters! Talked to the head desk clerk this morning—great guy—guess you guys saw him too, from the looks of it—gave me this stuff—”

Moriarity and Jackson looked it over.

“Yeh, yeh, fine quality stuff, there—”

“Huh—what you think—honoured guests—”

They calmed down and were quiet, a long while.

Marty said, “Your face isn’t too bad now.”

“Glad you think so.”

“Hurt?”

“Like hell.”

“It’ll pass. It’s healing up pretty well.”

“Seen the other guys?” Jackson asked.

“Nope.”

“Us neither. Guess they’re at the other end somewhere.”

“The other end,” Moriarity mimicked. “Hope they’re O.K., buddy.”

Marty: “So do I. Don’t know what’s going to happen, but so far—well—not too bad—I mean, compared to what . . .”

“Those fuckin’ Gooks—Jesus!” Slowly, quietly . . .

Jackson called out, “Hey, come on over and meet the rest of the guys. Pretty good bunch. You’d be surprised. You hungry? We got a stove here and everything—well, nearly everything—no geishas so far—hey, how about millet, sorghum—man—”

“That sounds like it might be good.”

“Buddy, are you kiddin’? This is it, but I mean, *it!*”

They were laughing. Jackson looked so serious

Moriarity said, “We’re livin’ off the fat of the land, now, eatin’ as good as any Gook too—see? So—No Bitchin’! You bitch, I kick your teeth in. You got any teeth? Face it, buddy: We finally made the grade!”

“Yeh, I know, but *what* grade, what—” Marty said.

Again, they were laughing.

Moriarity walked towards the other men in the hut.

"Hey—Balls a Fire! Listen—this here's our old Sarge—well, he ain't so old, really—just acts that way—Come to visit us a while. He stinks like hell, betcha crawlin' with lice—but he ain't always that way—ya gotta believe me! Anyhow—here's ol' Marty Landi—*Sarge* to you jerks—see?"

He moved among them, following Moriarity. Some were young men. Others, kids, he thought . . . not even eighteen. A few were around his own age, two or three older . . . *WW II GIs*, I bet . . . He was glad they were there . . .

Moriarity poured something out of a steaming pot into a can.

"Supper, buddy. Soyabeans, good for what ails ya."

Marty gobbled them down.

"I hear those characters down there in number 4 throw them out."

"Sure—hell, yes—nothin' but fillet mignon for those beauties!"

Jackson said, "They're sick a livin' anyhow—long time ago—"

"Clean-cut, good, clean-cut, mama's li'l angels—" Moriarity added.

"What the hell can ya do? All the boneheads in the service these days—" Jackson said.

Marty was smacking his lips.

Moriarity grinned. "You ol' bastard! Want some more?"

They rolled cigarettes and talked when he was through. The tobacco was wild, and hot. It sent Marty's head whirling, his whole body floating after him, a long, long while. They talked about the engagements they had been through since coming to "God's own little honey-pot." Strange names in their mouths . . . and those who had been with them, and had fallen . . . in detail they went over the last one . . . sadly . . . and some anger . . .

Someone was saying, "We wouldn't a been here if—" the rest trailed off somewhere past him, missing him . . . he had to hang on now . . . the floating really taking him . . . he was above them, looking far down on them . . . he took one last puff on the hot weed . . . and fought for words . . .

"What's the scoop?" he finally managed.

Moriarity was mumbling, the weed getting him too, "Christ only knows, J. Christ himself, buddy."

"Well, who the hell does?"

"Ha!" said Moriarity.

"What about these guys? How long they been here?"

"Couple months. How long you been here? You know?" Moriarity asked.

He thought about this.

"No."

They were quiet, letting the floating take them for a while . . . It was growing dark . . .

Moriarity said, "They go to classes."

"Yeh, that's right, I heard that in 4. What's it all about?"

"Didn't the guy tell ya?"

He thought about that.

"Oh, yeh, yeh, he did, yeh . . ." he mumbled, hanging on . . .

"'Improvin' their Daily Lives' . . ."

"Crazy, crazy as hell—"

"Every day they go—"

"'cept Sunday, man . . ."

"Yeh, that's right, Sunday—"

"What if they don't?"

"I dunno—ask Terry—hey, Terry—c'mere, will ya?"

The man ambled over. He was one of the older ones. He looked like a brazil-nut. Corporal.

"What can I do for ya, Chief?"

Moriarity tried to sit up. He couldn't make it.

"Sarge here wants to know what happens if ya don't go to

their fuckin'—classes—" he mumbled.

Terry eyed him, thinking it over.

Then, "Nothin' much, I hear. More or less ignore ya, I hear."

"Whaddya mean, man?" Jackson asked.

Terry looked him full in the face.

"They send ya up there—" He waved an arm. "Reactionaries' Section—"

Silence.... They looked at one another.

Finally, Marty asked, "What happens up there, Terry?"

"Like I said, nothin' much—"

"Yeh, yeh, man—"

"I ain't kiddin—honest, I mean it—"

Silence.

"Then why the hell you guys don't go up?"

"Ah ha—that ain't so easy, Sarge—"

"What?"

"Getting there—"

"Why?"

Terry leaned in to him.

"Listen, man, they try all kindsa stuff on ya first. Man, you gotta be hopeless, but *hopeless* before you—"

He didn't finish.

Marty looked at him. He wanted to laugh, suddenly. Loud, long peals of laughter, echoing forever, echoing ever, ever . . . Did I hear right?" he asked himself.

"Any guys come back?" Moriarity wondered.

"Couple. Changed their minds, I guess. Confessed."

"Confessed?" Marty said, trying to hang on . . .

"Yeh, man—listen, ya Gotta Confess—if ya fuck up the Programme—the Daily Life—Jesus—" Terry said, matter-of-factly.

Marty looked hard. Suddenly sober. But wondering: is he kidding me or isn't he? Is he pulling my leg?

Jackson and Moriarity looked at one another, then at him.

He lifted his eyes from the man before him. Turned them to the other men in the hut. Then, slowly, back to his friends, whose eyes, there, were upon his . . .

In a corner, Master Sergeant Bowman lay thinking. *Thirteen years in the Army, four in the Air Force . . . I know Supply from one end to the other. I know every damn item in the Manual. I got outa the Army 'cause I was sick of it, Air Force a helluva better deal. Kid officers in Supply make me sick. Snot noses. Punkos. I run the show anyhow. How the hell did I ever get stuck over here? Japan, there was good duty. Who the hell knew this fuckin' war would break out? How in the hell—I thought I knew my way around! Screw the Chinks and their schoolin' They're not gettin' me into any school. By Christ, what is this? I used to tell off those pantywaist teachers in school, long, long time ago. I remember that Education jerk on some base, where the hell was it? Tryin' all the time to get the men into his goddamn classes. Fuckin' feather merchant time waster. Writin' letters, puttin' up posters, showin' how Important it all was. I showed him. I showed him. Walked into his goddamn office one day, took four chairs what he had there in the waitin' room, and he couldn't stop me. He was scared stiff. I scared the shit outa him! Walked right in, took them. 'What you doin', Sergeant?' he says. 'What you think? You blind?' The look on his face! 'Who sent you down here?' Ha! 'Nobody, I sent myself down, I run Supply, whose property I move is my business.' 'That's not a very nice thing to do, Sarge!' 'You sure got a lot to learn, buddy!' I called him buddy. Civil service punk, I called him buddy. Grind 'em under! And off I walked with the chairs, bustin' his doorknob on the way out. Jesus, we had a good laugh! He was scared stiff. Keeeerist! Teachers. Fungos. Time-wastin' mothers. No use for teachers in the military. No use at all! What we need here is MEN! The little shit was scared stiff! He probably was a commie anyhow. 'All those types a guys are anyhow, I know, don't shit me. God-*

damn them. Joe's showin' them. Tail gunner Joe's showin them. Yehhhh. Get 'em, Joe, get 'em all, Joe, knock the piss right outa them, Joe . . . HA! The shit! The little shit! Hell, if he'da started somethin'—I was twice his size anyway! I'm a big man. Big man. So, don't mess with me, buddies! . . .

A Chinese guard interrupted his reverie.

"Up!"

Bowman sat up, grinning at him.

"Up! Up!"

Bowman was on his feet.

"Quiggly! March!" said the guard.

"O.K. O.K. Where we go, huh? Where? I go, quick quick."

"School. Quiggly!"

"No foolin'? Oh, boy oh boy!"

"Quiggly—"

Bowman double-timed.

. . . DON'T MESS WITH ME, BUDDIES . . .

5

“QUIGGLY! Quiggly!”

Someone was prodding him. He had just gone off to sleep. He had washed for the first time in weeks. Hot water - courtesy of Moriarity: from the big can boiling on top of the stove. An old oil drum, it was kept filled with water there most of the time. Moriarity's own invention. Wrapping himself in his blankets, he had fallen off to sleep on the straw mat which was his bed. There was no light in the hut. They went to bed soon after darkness fell...

“Cut it out, you dumb bastard!” he yelled, breaking the surface abruptly, his heart thumping wildly...

A light was flashing in his face, hurting his eyes. He fought to evade the painful brilliance, and also to catch a glimpse of the face he knew would be behind it... he could see the form of the body which belonged to it as he turned and twisted... the light following him...

“Get that outa my eyes, stupid bastard!”

It worked. The burning of the light went elsewhere. Million red-points fading... the guard, in whose hands the flashlight lay, appeared... the light danced about the room... it played on a tommy-gun held by another guard... Marty lay there... the guard kicked more vigorously this time... hot pain shot upwards...

“Quiggly! Quiggly!”

Slowly, he raised himself to his feet, swaying there, in the light the guard had once again turned on him, this time, however, not in his eyes... the pain became a dull aching now... he awaited the guard's instructions... he wished he could get at them, choke them, choke the life right out of them.

No verbal instructions, but Marty caught on when they started

pushing and kicking him towards the door.

He wanted to get his hands on them . . . his own voice erupted out of him suddenly, raging at them . . .

"Going for a walk, are we? *Pig faces! Bring that face nearer so I can get my hands around your neck*, you lousy PIG-FACED Bastard—PIG FACE—"

The one with the weapon levelled it at him, chattering something . . .

He fought with his rage . . . stamping hard on it . . . an ancient fear taking him . . . its power checking him . . . holding him . . .

In the darkness, they moved among the huts. The squat outlines became clear only when they were about to run into them. They passed five, six, perhaps seven, and then a light could be seen ahead, the only light he could detect in the whole area. When they reached the hut from which it came, the guards shoved him in.

In a room similar to the one he had been in earlier today, a single light bulb, naked, hanging from the ceiling, dimly burned. Blue smoke was curling round it. Behind the desk sat Ching.

The room was very small. It was just large enough to hold the few pieces of furniture (desk, small cabinet, two chairs) and, at the most, three men.

Ching beckoned him to sit. He smiled, and said, gently, "Now, we'll go on with our talk, O.K.?" He pushed something to the far corner of the desk, away from Marty. It was the revolver.

"I'm very sorry about the pistol," he said, so forlornly, "it's a formality, a Rule, you see . . ."

He gave a little giggle, a naughty little giggle, and he leaned forward saying, almost racily, "To tell you the truth, I can't even fire it!"

. . . yes, yes, oh yes, Ching . . .

He waited . . .

"Now then," Ching said, "talk to me, tell me everything.

What's on your mind?"

Marty stared at him. He heard Moriarity's voice: crazy, crazy as hell . . . he was frightened . . .

But he told him, "Why the hell drag me out at this time of night?"

Ching was unhappy. "Ah, yes, yes. I *am* sorry. You see, it can't be helped. I assure you. We have so many to help, we have to schedule sessions day and night. We don't like to, but we must. Time, *time* you see."

"Don't you ever sleep?" Marty asked.

"Oh, my sleeping hours are well-arranged. Don't you worry. Wait, and you'll see as we progress, how important it is to arrange things. To Plan. That's half the battle won."

Purring Ching, in-stride Ching, happy, loving, dear little Ching . . .

He pulled a desk drawer open and reached into it.

Marty braced himself.

"Have a cigarette," Ching said.

Marty was delighted, and accepted. It was a *real* cigarette. Ching gave him a light. He puffed hungrily. It felt so good, the smoke swirling within him, expanding him, soothing him . . .

Ching, he noted, had the questionnaire before him.

He was annoyed. "When you goin' to send that out?"

"Why, very, very soon," Ching said, surprised. "We have to extract some information first, for our files, you understand."

"No, I don't. I don't remember you saying that. You said it was going right out—"

"But surely, you realize we must have your name, rank, and so forth. We are not savages. Nor is this a German concentration camp—"

"You've told me that before—"

"Yes, I know I've told you before, but it hasn't sunk in, has it? Listen, we have a file on each one of you, so that each can have his progress toward the Good Daily Life recorded, along

with other minor details. But now, please, let me ask you some questions. I've studied your form more carefully now. It interests me very much. You've left the space requesting information about your educational background blank. Why is that? Anyone can tell you've had a fair amount of education—"

"Look, you said this was to notify my family with—they already know my educational background—"

"Ah, yes, but our files—our hopes for you—"

He was angry now, and stared flatly at Ching. "Look, listen. I am un-interested in your 'hopes' for me, your 'files,' your 'Good Daily Life'. Get that straight. I just want to stick it out here, and by and by get back home. You better understand that and save yourself a lot of time and trouble."

Ching, clicking his tongue, looked very hurt.

"Why must you talk like that? You haven't even heard my questions—"

"Just send the form out, Ching—"

A long while, sitting there, a long while . . .

The cigarette was all gone . . .

"Was your high school near the colliery?" so softly.

Vaguely startled, Marty did not answer.

"Perhaps it was near the colliery, perhaps your father even passed it each day as he went to work . . ." the Ching-voice.

No answer . . . Ching offered another cigarette . . .

"You did put down here that he was a coal miner," tenderly reminding . . .

"So what?" the words shot from him. He was surprised to hear them.

Ching, with zest, "Do you remember the Depression?"

But he had lost him, though he waited . . .

"You are 26. I'm sure you remember. I'm sure your father remembers. Your name is Italian. What part of Italy did he come from?"

"My name is Eskimo. My father was born in an Igloo. My

whole family were born in Igloos. I was the last to be born in an Igloo. They came over on the Mayflower . . .”

Silence. Shocked silence. Saint Ching in shocked silence . . .

At last, “That’s not funny. You do yourself serious damage by trying to be funny. You will pay in the end for your so-called funniness. Oh, no, *we* won’t do anything. *You* will, you will to yourself, inside, you will pay. When did he go to the States?”

Marty felt good. He had scored. He puffed his new cigarette slowly, tenderly . . .

“Why don’t you answer? Don’t you trust me?” Ching, so hurt . . .

Sharply, “When you going to send that form out?”

. . . *by the balls* . . .

“Why don’t you answer?” Ching asked.

“Why you fucking me around? I took you at your word. I filled the thing out—you think my family wants to wait until you’re good and ready to send it out?”

“You don’t trust me,” lamented Ching.

“Well, why don’t you stick to your word?”

Ching entreated, “We are not savages. We are here to help you.”

Marty thumped the table.

“Then send me back to my lines. Go on. Line up transportation right now, even one of those jitneys that took me up here—part of the way—”

Ching sighed, all wise and patient now . . .

“Ah, ah, your attitude—tsk tsk—not a good one. You must study. Yes. If you learn well, who knows? We may do that. We don’t want to keep you from your people. It has been done. But in your condition—no, I’m sorry—go back to your quarters now. We will talk again. Goodnight.”

He called the guards, and they took Marty back . . .

He stumbled into the dark room, trying to find his place.

"Hey, that you, buddy?" came a voice.

It was Moriarity.

"Yeh."

"Over here, boy."

"Thanks a lot."

The straw mat was so good to get back to . . . the blankets wonderful to wrap up in . . . around and around him . . .

"What's cooking?"

"Guy wanted to talk to me."

"Weird, huh? What did I tell ya?"

"Weird as hell," Marty said, softly.

"What did he ask ya?"

"What part of Italy my father came from. Stuff like that."

"Can ya beat it—"

"Gave me a cigarette. Real cigarette."

"Got any of it left?"

"Nope."

"Sonuvabitch."

"They talked to you much?"

"Nah. Just filled in that Red Cross form—"

"Oh, yeh?"

"Whatsamatter?"

"That thing's a fake."

"Sweet Jesus, is it? My folks—"

"It never leaves this place, I'm damn sure. They use it for their own purposes."

"Dirty fuckers. All those screwy questions—but I figured the Red Cross knew what it was doing—"

Silence.

"Didn't you?"

"I guess so."

Some of the men were stirring now.

"Hey—knock it off, O.K.?" someone said.

"Let's hit the hay, buddies—" another voice came.

Moriarity whispered, "Christ, what a place! Hey, did you say he gave you an extra fag?"

"No."

"Sonuvabitch," Moriarity muttered, rolling over, falling asleep almost at once . . .

The guards returned a short while later. Marty was awake. He heard the footsteps outside, then inside, then the flashing light dancing about the room, coming to rest finally on Jackson, who was kicked awake, pulled to his feet . . . he staggered, cursing, reaching out for the guards . . . they slugged him a few times . . . he fell over . . . they waited, then pulled him to his feet again . . . pushed him along, stumbling over sleeping men, now awakened men . . . dragged him to the door, shoved him out—muttering and complaining from all corners of the room now . . . whole hut awakened . . . yelling—then, gradually, quieting down . . . men going back to sleep, or trying to go back to sleep . . . wondering when it would happen again . . . The guards returned twice. Once, with Jackson. Then, for Moriarity . . .

Marty, at last, slept . . .

. . . there was a moon and it hung brilliantly, perfectly whole and lovely, shimmering, not even a cloud whisking across to disturb it, so that when the order came he did not hear it, only suddenly aware of great activity and movement all around. Designed to hurt, disturb the magic beauty. Men climbing and struggling out of their positions, moving forward quickly, the soft night air caressing everything, and above all: the white beauty, commanding the night . . . someone was tugging at him. Looking up, he saw it was one of them, urging him, beckoning him, and suddenly he realized what was happening and he was up and running and part of them, taking his place, doing his job . . . All at once, it was the next day. The moon was gone. They were pressing on, searching for the enemy,

for though his back was broken, he was still alive, and had to be found, and destroyed. On and on, breakneck speed. Men and machines, north, always north. The capital. GIs in ditches. Many with hands tied behind them, neat holes in their heads. Now they were entering the capital. Out of a shattered building came a man with a letter. It was his father. He was heavy with sadness. He walked slowly. His face was so old. He was ill. You could see the illness in his face, you could feel it. He was speaking, but the words were barely audible. They seemed to be a mixture of Italian and English. He could not make out many of them, but he heard enough to catch the meaning: Loss, Defeat, Death, Decay . . . Youth, strength, gone, all gone . . . sorrow only . . . helplessness . . . blackness, doom, racing towards him, soon taking him. He opened the letter. It was from his mother, and in Italian. It was very brief, and said he must study, he was missed very much at home by everybody, how happy Easter would be, when they could all once again be together . . .

Marty awoke. He was unhappy. The sadness pressed upon him. He could see, he could hear the faces and voices before him, the dream so real, so much part of him, springing from depths more real than anything *out there*, from the very fibre and core of him, where truth, he knew, alone lay . . . The pain of awareness pulsed through him. Taking him, now, irrevocably, along paths he would rather, in waking hours, in the light, not follow, never come near . . . First light of dawn approaching. Murmuring and movement in the hut. Breathing. He fastened onto them, seeking relief. The mat next to him was empty. How long had he been gone? He lay there, quietly. He felt himself being taken back to the dream . . . he felt the pain of it upon him, growing stronger . . . his gaze moved to the window, to the side of him . . . the dream waned . . . he watched the dawn advance, nudging more and more night-shadows out of the way . . . ushering in morning, leading her in, so gently, tenderly . . .

dream fragments whirling, within him . . . he tried to collect them . . . his father, the letter, his mother, Easter . . . suddenly, *cold* . . . the word, the awful word echoing . . . *Easter* . . . he had known even then, when she wrote it . . . yes, yes, of course . . . and, *too late* . . . he felt the heaviness increasing its pressure on all parts of him, seeking, finding the interior of him . . . now his whole being succumbing to it . . . his eyes burned . . . the pressure behind them was unbearable . . . they erupted . . . tears flowed, and spilled, all over his face . . .

A dragging and scuffling and scraping. A heavy thump. Moriarity was back. Blood spilled from a gash on his forehead. More from his cheek, and mouth. He had fallen, or rather, had been dropped by the guards drag-carrying him back . . .

They left. He struggled to emerge from the heaviness. He had to do something. Moriarity was hurt. It was so hard. He struggled, a part of him urging, trying. The sadness, so heavy upon him. Other men were awake. They stared languidly at the collapsed figure in the early light. They sat up a moment, then lay back, rolled over and tried to regain sleep. At last, he could move an arm. Now a leg . . . gradually, he was free, his heart thudding, his forehead and face in cold sweat.

He did what he could for his friend. Rough bandages out of some clothing. Bathed the wounds. He pulled him to his mat and covered him with both their blankets . . .

After a while, Moriarity regained consciousness.

He was crying, helpless rage and humiliation leaping through him, choking him.

"That soq'vabitch . . ."

Marty, gently, "What happened?"

"He had his guard club the shit outa me."

"Ching?"

"Don't know—"

"What did he look like?"

"Little jerk with glasses."

... *no, not Ching*...

"What did you say to him?"

"Nothin'! That's the whole trouble, I think. He asked and asked, one thing after another. I just sat there. Sometimes I said my name, rank, and number. He got madder and madder. Called me Truman's Stogie. He asked me what I thought of him. I said he was a great little guy. He calls the guard in, says somethin' to him, and he starts clubbin' me. *Jesus! It hurt!* Flattens me. Stars all over the place. They splash water on me. After a while I'm up. He asks again: What about Truman? I say the same thing. *Clobber!* Stars again. Kickin' and punchin' me this time all over the fuckin' place, wiped the floor up with me . . . *Dirty bastards* . . . here I am . . ." He was trying to wipe away the tears . . .

He made it sound like minutes. Marty knew he must have been gone for hours . . .

"That was pretty rough, ol' buddy," he said quietly.

"Anyhow, I get the hell out now. The little prick kept screamin' at me, between clouts, 'Reactionary something-or-other,' I dunno, and, 'You belong Up There—you will go Up There!' See? I'm pretty sure he said that—I get outa here, I betcha!"

"Let's hope so."

"'Reactionary'—is that good, Marty?"

"If it gets you out of here, it must be."

Moriarity was quieting down.

"You'll probly make it soon."

"I dunno—I got the desk-clerk—" Marty murmured.

"Well, don't say too much. Say nothin'."

"I'll try."

"You got to"

"O.K. What about some sleep?"

It looked like it might be a grin on Moriarity's face. But

just for an instant. It was too painful.

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," he mumbled . . .

Marty watched over him a while longer. The eyes closed. Sleep took him . . .

The men were up. One of them shuffled over. He was big, brown-haired, big-faced, eyes set wide-apart. Flat nose. Wide, grinning mouth.

"Name's Hopkins, Sarge. I'm uh—sorta the—squad leader here—they told me to, I can't help it—"

"Who's 'they'?"

"The Chinks."

"Guess you can't."

"What?"

"Help it."

Hopkins mused over that one.

Finally, he said, "Anyhow, if you wanta take over—we'll ask 'em, O.K.?"

"Don't know how long I'm going to be here. What's your rank?"

"Staff."

"Well, let's wait awhile."

"Yeh, well, anytime, just say the word."

They sat down.

"What's the scoop?" Marty said.

"Well, ya see—we gotta go outside and line up—uh— for roll call—and then—listen to the music—marches, and stuff—they play it over a p.a. system—and uh then uh pick up the chow and uh—hey, that's a laugh—chow! and uh, then class—we go to class—"

He paused.

"And then?"

• "Well, then we come back—and uh—yeh—nave cnow, see? and then—study hour—yeh—then, well, ya saw it gets dark

pretty early—I wasn't here yesterday, had some stuff to take care of—what's your name?"

"Marty."

"Well, shake—what the hell can we do? Play it cool. That's all. Know what I mean? Lookit your buddy, what happened to him—"

He saw Marty did not like that. He shifted.

"Well, ya know what I mean—gotta Roll with the Punches—what the hell can we do? Know what I mean?"

Marty said nothing.

Hopkins shifted around some more.

All that bulk is sawdust, Marty thought.

"How old are you, Hopkins?"

He saw it now, the defiance coming into his face, high-school kid answering teacher, he thought. He waited for the answer, looking straight into the face—

"Twenty-one—"

"Well, you've got pretty good rank for that age, don't you know?"

"Yeh—guess so—yeh—lotta guys was—shot—yeh guess so, good rank—"

"Lotta guys shot—"

Hopkins shifted, trying to get away.

"Yeh, guess so—"

"You got their rank—"

Big bulk in panic.

"Guess so, yeh—"

Marty, suddenly, violently, up close to him, right in his face, "*Then why don't you use it? Why the hell don't you?*"

The men looked over their way. Hopkins fumbled around, rose slowly to his feet, clenching and unclenching his fists, standing there before him a long while, then the big ham hands dropped to his sides, the whole huge body seemed to collapse in on itself, a football suddenly deflated . . . He turned, slowly, and began to shuffle off . . .

6

IT was hot, and under the sack-like shirts which had been given them by their captors the sweat gathered and poured, the shirts sticking fast to their bodies. Twenty of them sat in class. Most of them from Marty's hut. A huge red flag hung behind the instructor. On it was a white dove. Under it, in English, was written, "Grand Rally for World Peace." The instructor, known as Big Ears among the students, droned on and on. He was talking about Lenin. Sometimes he would stop, call one of the students, and ask questions. Then he would ask for discussion

...

Marty felt he was in a dream, floating in it to his doom, helpless to stop it...

The morning was passing. He was hungry. He wondered whether the millet, soyabeans, and occasional rice would be enough to keep him alive. He tried to calculate how much weight he had lost. *It keeps them alive...* He recalled the rations of Chinese troops in the field: rice, rice and rice. And sometimes, rice. A song started to go through his head, "You Are My Sunshine." He saw the juke joint where he used to hear it played. Nancy sat in a booth with four guys from Drake High. She was giggling. The record changed. Slow, romantic number. Perry Como and "Masquerade Ball." She was in his arms. They were completely alone on the dance floor... *You were around sixteen . . . she was still able to look after the family . . . she used to cook rice once in a while. She mixed scrambled eggs and butter with it.* Now he heard Ching's voice: "Do you remember the Depression?" Trent Street. They came to live there just after he was born. And left only when he went to college. And then, the family moved *Red Beets*. He used to hate red beets. Sometimes she used to cook them,

and he could never eat them. She used to make a vegetable soup. It contained just about a little bit of everything from his father's garden. It made him sick to look at it. Thick, green leaves floating in it. Now his mouth watered just thinking of it. *A pailful*, he thought, *God, a pailful!* *During the really bad years, Ching, when my father was working maybe two days a month and we lived on Relief, we used to have that often. I couldn't get it down no matter how hungry I was. And I would force her to take it away and get something else for me. I don't know where, but somehow, somewhere, she would find a piece of cheese and sausage—meaty, hard, red sausage—delicious, oh, Jesus. Delicious! You could eat it raw—it was even better that way. And I'd have it with her own bread. I used to watch her make the bread. She kneaded the dough. Her hands made a billowy ball of it . . . Like her breasts . . . Yeast . . . he smelled the yeast, he loved the smell of yeast. All wrapped up in tinfoil. He would unwrap it for her. Square little packets. At last she put the dough in pans and slipped them into the oven of the coal stove. When he came in from the field, across the back yard, he was greeted by that wonderful aroma of bread baking . . . His sister ate the thick soup and he felt guilty eating the sausage and cheese. Afterwards, slices of apple which his father prepared for them, so carefully. He didn't look at his sister when they had supper. Nor at his father. His father looked very worried. *He was worried about you . . .* But his father never interfered when his mother gave in to him. If he did, as he had a long time ago, on one or two occasions, Marty knew how to get her on his side, and she would become furious, call him names, cry, and carry on for a long while, until she was near exhaustion. He could count on her to do this whenever his father tried to discipline him in any way. She took these as an *attack* on her beloved Marty. Between them, his father was rendered near-impotent. Marty could see his eyes, scolding, reproving him, but his mouth—shut. He used*

to feel smug, triumphant. But a part of him was terrified . . .

"Wake that man up!"

Knowing, even then, a part of him . . .

"Answer the question!"

That the moorings which should have been forming were in fact destroyed in their very inception by each of his triumphs . . . and that he was adrift in a vast ocean, with no way to check to drift . . . and how this was, even now, the basis of what he felt was gnawing away at his life, rendering him vulnerable to all kinds of trickery . . . treachery . . . seductions . . . He wanted to put his head down. He wanted to cry. A great weight was pressing on his neck . . .

A voice thundered through to him.

"Stand up! Stand up!"

He remembered where he was. The shock dug deep.

"Answer the question!"

The words reached him. They were meant for him. It was his first class day and he hadn't heard one word. The lecture had sailed right by him. He looked up. Big Ears was well named, he thought. Small, baby-faced, glasses. Ears that seemed to have been borrowed from a giant. He wished he would disappear, utterly.

"Stand Up! STAND UP! You must pay attention! You are not here to be idle! Are your comrades idle? *Of course not!* They are Good Workers! We have a place for Idlers—Up There!" He flourished an arm in a grand gesture.

Slowly, Marty got to his feet.

What the hell's coming off now?

"Do you know the Answer?" Big Ears challenged.

Marty ventured, "To what?"

There was an instant of absolute silence during which he thought he could hear the swishing of a very faint breeze crossing from one open window to the other. And then suddenly, like an explosion, Big Ears, having risen to his full height, screamed

and thrashed his arms. His whirling arms struck books, tablets, inkstand, knocking all to the floor.

It went on for a long while.

The class sat there, enthralled.

At last, the screeches began to diminish and a few words, here and here, could be made out.

"To—*what*—you—to—"

And then, finally, an intelligible sentence.

"*You must confess!*"

Silence.

Marty asked, "Confess what?"

It looked like it would begin again. But Big Ears mastered himself, at least, to the point of intelligibility.

"Confess that you are an Idler and not paying Attention. Confess that you are filled with Rotten Bourgeois Ideas. Confess you were thinking of the bare thighs of Korean women. *How many have you raped?*" he screamed.

Marty stood there, half wanting to laugh, but marvelling at at the man's energy, wondering where, in that frail body, it could possibly be stored. He delivered tirade after tirade, great floods of words rushing. He was listing just about every crime ever committed, demanding Marty's immediate confession to them all.

Marty thought of books. He tried to think of all he had read. He tried listing them in alphabetical order. Which ones dealt with this situation?

His heart began to thump quickly.

Big Ears gradually lapsed into silence, and stood there, panting, obviously taxed by the effort. He watched Marty, and waited for the Confession.

Which did not come.

He ordered the whole class to stand at attention.

They did so at once.

Then, in a nearly normal voice, he said, "Wher, your comrade

confesses, you can all sit down. Understand?" He waved his arms. "I don't care—two, three days—a month—same difference to me—you all stand until he Confesses!"

Is this the fellow Moriarity had encountered, Marty asked himself. He wished he were here in the classroom. But he was gone. Early this morning they had come for him. Reactionary Section . . . they had shaken hands. Moriarity was so pleased . . . grinning, "See you soon, buddy . . ."

He couldn't wait to get up there with him, and Jackson, and maybe Kowatski—and the others—*well, now is the time . . . Yes, now is the Time!* He thought of Ching. He hated him. He wished he had never bothered with him. Hadn't even said one word to him. *Well, I haven't said or done anything . . . anything . . . Have I?* He tried to go over everything he had ever said to him. He saw his face, kindly, sad, smiling . . . *No! I'm damn sure I haven't! Now I'll keep my mouth shut . . . that's all . . . that'll put me up there . . . Where I belong!* But he was frightened, thinking of what Big Ears might get into his head to do. *What the hell is there to stop him? Maybe those guys from number 4 will come chargin' up here to save me . . . Yahoooo, Beauties.* He felt suddenly alone . . . real devils out there . . . cold . . . they could mutilate him . . . kill him . . .

A half hour passed. The class still stood.

The heat grew more intense. An hour later, it must have been 98 outside and over 100 in the classroom. They were still on their feet. Sweat poured from them. They swayed. Now, mutterings began. Softly, at first, then louder, louder still, until by noon, he could make out what they were saying. What little hopes he had about their supporting him were shattered . . .

Four or five voices, almost a chorus: "C'mon, confess—what the hell!"

Heard by Big Ears, who came running in from outside. He yelled for the guards. Then he went up to his desk and sat

there, primly, facing the class, saying nothing, just watching, waiting . . .

After a while, however, he raised his hand, signalling for silence. "You see, you stand alone! I hope you see that. Completely Alone! Your classmates recognize your error and urge you to Confess. Will you? Or will you prove yourself Flotsam? Dire Consequences will follow! Why do you stubbornly refuse to recognize your errors? It is so obvious to Everyone! *You must confess!* It is Absolutely Essential! You must Cleanse yourself! You will never get started on the road to the Good Daily Life otherwise! You will remain a dumb, stupid, blind tool of the Wall Street Warmongers, and their Running Dogs the British Imperialists! Give the matter Cognition! *Confess!*"

He sat down. The voices took him up, vigorously.

One, behind Marty: "Confess!"

Another: "Confess, you jerk!"

Now, all clamouring. Some coming to him clearly.

"What the hell are you, a Hero?"

"For Christ's sake, buddy, *confess!*"

"C'mon, man, C'MON!"

"*Confess! Confess!*"

It became a chant.

And now Big Ears: "Have you not received Lenient Treatment since being Liberated? Are you not now spitting in our faces? CONFESS!"

He was terrified of the chant echoing up and down the room, and he said to himself frantically: *Now I've gone mad! I know I've gone mad! Flipped! Utterly! Hellish nightmare! I'll wake up soon, won't I?* But he heard the chant clearly. It was no dream. It was real, and happening, right here and now, *happening*. His heart beat violently. It thumped at his chest. He was afraid it would break out of him. *What's the damn difference? Why should they suffer for me?* Laughter within.

Suffer? Dumb bastard. So what? So what the hell what? Might make men out of one, two of them, dumb bastard, think of another! Besides, what business are they of yours? As if you cared about their "suffering"—you're as yellow as any of them—. You know what you care about. You know. Don't hand me that . . . The clamour rose. He fell deeper into the nightmare. He felt sick to his stomach. Then directly ahead, he saw Hopkins. It was strange he hadn't noticed him before. A sack of flour. *But he isn't chanting.* He was surprised, and buoyed up by the discovery. He kept his eyes on the giant's back. *I am no longer along the hot, dry corridor of Hell by myself.* He looked around. Two or three others were not chanting. Silent, swaying there in the hot oven but—*not chanting.* Definitely. He looked up at Big Ears. *He can wait a month. I'll keel over before a month is out . . . so will the rest of them . . . unless . . . a week? . . . couple days? . . . unless . . .* It hit him hard, the awareness of what could happen. soon, now, *now*, before anything *near* keeling over happened . . . He pictured them jumping him, knocking him down, kicking him, tearing, trampling... A wave of panic swept him away... *Anything but that! BY MY OWN KIND! Troops of the line . . . some in companies just to the right—or left—and out of the night we all heard them: bugles, noise-makers, flutes, yes, there in the moonlight, where the hills never ended, where the valleys were great teasers, existing just to entice you to the next hill, and the next. Flautists playing in the moonlight, advancing, a weird, mournful tune... they held their fire... they were unimportant . . . the main body would follow . . . the main body . . . bees and honey . . . Not this Honey . . . stinking rice fields¹ we have sloshed through . . . everywhere, everything, even the trees smelling of it . . . not so bad here though. Maybe they use different methods . . . what else can they use? Poor bastards . . .*

Memorial Day . . . Band playing. They were all there in the

brilliant sunshine, the parade. Old men, young men, kids, boy scouts, girl scouts, high school bands, firetrucks, majorettes and cheerleaders, everybody and everything. And the teachers. American Legion band solemn, boom boooming . . . snappy high school bands . . . jazzy . . . hundreds of tiny high school kids waving little flags, all cute as the dickens . . . in white . . . bigger kids on their bikes, all decorated up, red, white, blue crepe paper around and through the spokes, handlebars, cross-bars, fenders . . . Miss Alunas . . . her face in one of the cars, just passing . . . her face smiling at you . . . waving at you, white gloved hand . . . blushing, turning away, happy, heart thumping, somersaulting, running for home . . . to dream of her, tonight to dream of her . . . In her class he was her pet . . . he showed off all the time . . . he was in love with her . . . he was the smartest in the class . . . he burst into the house . . . his mother was in the kitchen . . . he was out of breath . . . she turned to him . . .

Within the next hour, the man standing next to him edged closer and closer, and finally began to nudge him. Soon, the man on his right followed suit.

Others were crowding around him. He was hemmed in.

"Confess."

"Confess."

Gnawing at him.

"C'mon, c'mon, you're in the wrong, buddy, you know that . . ."

"C'mon, boy, c'mon."

He heard his own voice, suddenly, surprising him even, rising above all the clamour, in that moment, for that moment, silencing it . . .

"YOU STUPID BUNCH OF BASTARDS!"

In the brief silence that followed, he felt the new mood being born, all around him. It gripped and held him, froze him with fear. He felt it fusing them, directing them, remorselessly.

They were on him like tigers. He fell to the floor. They kicked and punched him unconscious. And would have done more. But Big Ears waved in the guards. Soon it was over . . .

Blood pounding through him. Voices. He wanted his breath. He fought for his breath. He knew: without it there is nothing. Swaying blackness. Voices in the blackness. Hot blackness. A whimpering, within him. Voices, partly within, partly from the room. Within: far away, other times, not at all involved with the moment, this moment, carved out of man-earth-time, hurting voices, reaching him, holding him, then slipping away, lost in the darkness of time. Night descending and taking him, suspending him a moment, then releasing him, sending him plunging in an endless, timeless fall, a small speck falling forever and ever towards nowhere, into the very emptiness of the universe, infinite, dark, indifferent universe: from now, to then, to never, falling towards immemorial shadows of non-being and chaos, a sudden terror pulling him back, momentarily, and then: screaming in darkness, falling to the ends of everything, the beginnings of nothing . . .

“HEY . . . buddy . . . ”

He was rocking, and through the mist he saw a pink mass, slowly assuming some form, until before him appeared a man.

“C’mon, buddy.”

He was sure he wasn’t dreaming.

“What is—where—” he gasped.

“A hut. C’mon, man, you gotta get up!”

Still dark . . .

“What—what for?”

. . . *God not him oh not him again* . . .

“Camp Commander wants to see you.”

“What the hell for?”

A few candles were burning. He looked around. He saw he was in the hut, on his mat. He ached all over . . .

“Who are you, anyway?” he mumbled.

“Slater. C’mon. He wants to see you.”

“Camp Commander?”

“Yep.”

“That his name?”

“Look, buddy—”

Pain. He stretched and struggled, but could not make the sitting position. He wondered why he had so much pain. He thought and thought about it. Slowly, focusing on one of the candles, it came back. It sickened him, made the pain worse . . .

“Yehhhhhh . . . ” Pause. “Well—what the hell you—you his orderly, Slater?”

No answer.

“Must be—you rate—candles—deal—big deal—”

He was remembering everything—the pain all through him—the sadness of knowing, the loneliness of knowing . . .

Dawn.

The man before him was broad-faced. Good nose, eyes. Not too big.

. . . *Ching-size* . . .

He said, "You're a damn dope. Stubborn as a mule. You don't know from nuthin' yet, nuthin'."

"Nuthin', yehhhhh—" and then, "you a GI?"

"Damn right. Wised-up GI."

. . . *wised-up* . . .

"Let's go."

. . . *been waiting all my life to meet wised-up GI and look where I have to come to find one to find* . . .

"Hey—Slater . . ."

The eyes narrowed.

He couldn't resist. "Yeh?"

"What you . . . wised-up about?"

Slater was angry.

"You kiddin' me Joe?"

"Ah, just call me Marty—or Sarge—if you remember ranks—one above corporal—c'mon what you wised-up about?"

"You'll find out in time."

"How long, ol' buddy?"

"Look, don't monkey around."

"I'm not, Slater. I mean it—how long?"

No answer.

"How long you been here?"

No answer.

"That's a pretty long time. Ouch—Jesus—it hurts all over, Slater, what in hell's wrong with me? Long time—going to take all that long to wise me up, Slater buddy?"

"Look, you think I got—"

"Yehhhhhhhh . . ." Looking hard at him. "But what you wised-up about?"

"You're a smart guy—"

"C'mon, I'd like to know. I'd really like to know—"

"I told ya, in time you'll find out yourself."

"Yeh, I know, but I'd like to hear it from *you*, sport—"

"Don't call me that—"

Somehow he got to his feet.

"What you want me to call you, pisspot?"

Candles flickering. Dawn coming. Quickly.

Slater, after a while, "C'mon."

They made it outside. They were walking between the huts. They passed some guards. Slater waved to them, and they waved back, pointing to Marty, laughing . . .

"Friends, sporty?"

. . . *an article: I was Beaten Up on my First Day in School . . .*

They passed the building.

. . . *alma mater . . .*

But the pain was with him . . . *You're not so funny . . .*

"You teach any classes, Sporty?"

Slater snapped, "Look, I ain't gonna take much more of that shit."

"Well, kiss me never! Wise me up, O.K., buddy?"

Slater, flushing now, said, "You're a fucked up tool of the Warmongers, Joe—"

"Marty—"

"—you just don't know the score—wait till you find out—you'll wish you kept your ass the hell outa this country—"

"What country?"

No answer.

"How old you, Sport?"

"Your goddamn business?"

"Jerk, listen: you listenin'? First chance I get I'm goin' to clobber you. And if we ever get back, I'll see you in court. Oh, Jesus, I will. Last thing I do I will. Star witness I'll be. Where the hell you from, anyhow?"

Though he knew the accent . . .

Slater, snarling, stopped in front of a building.

"Here we are, smart guy. You better wise the hell up."

"O.K., Buttercup. Have fun now. Say hello to all your buddies for me. Tell them mamma's coming soon with ice cream. Maybe peaches too. Tell them thanks for taking me back to the hut today."

The pain was turning to stiffness . . .

"Your attitude stinks," said Slater. "You know where you're headin' for? Up There!" and then, "C'mon, I gotta take you in. . ."

"Good deal! C'mon, boy, show me in. C'mon. Hey, how long did it take you to wise up, I mean, a smart man like you? You guys have a contest? What's the prize? Two grains of rice? You sure are lucky, wised-up and all that—you sure are, lucky, wised-up and all that—you sure are, Sporty. . ."

Before him, behind a rough desk, sat an officer of no mean rank. He was immaculately dressed. He had the air of success.

"I am Colonel Wan, Camp Commander." Pause. "Do you know why you are here?"

. . . sure, I'm a mind reader . . .

"Because my old buddy Slater brought me."

Slightly ruffled.

"That's beside the point. Of course he brought you. I repeat: do you know why you are here?"

. . . a fit? have hysterics? . . .

. . . old Ching arranged all this . . .

"Why don't you answer?"

Pause. *. . . lady, Dr., in the Balcony . . .*

"Colonel—what the hell you want?"

. . . no way to talk to a Colonel . . .

. . . that is no way . . .

"You are perfectly aware of the gross liberties you take with our Lenient Policy. How long can that be tolerated? Do you

have any idea?"

... English accent of no mean sort ...

"Our Lenient Policy is no joke. You must realize that."

"Oh, I do, I do, Colonel ... Didn't I have a little sample? Yesterday? Or—day before?"

Mildly annoyed. "When you refuse to Confess your Errors --what can you expect? Remember, it was your own classmates! They naturally take matters into their own hands. They work very hard, very sincerely and appreciate our Leniency."

He paused, and took an elegant cigarette case from his coat pocket. It popped open. Within, neat, round cigarettes lay snug against one another. He extended it towards Marty ...

... oh daddy ...

"Go ahead. I wish we had enough to go around all your friends. Even the ones Up There. But we are so poor. Your planes destroy all our supplies. At the same time barbarously levelling our villages!"

"Our?"

But the bait swept by. "I speak only as a friend of the Korean people. I'm sure you realize that We are all volunteers. Brothers. When one of their villages is razed—it feels like one of our—" In sorrow ...

Marty happily took the cigarette. He liked the Colonel. He inhaled the delicious smoke.

... when the WPA was working on the road they used to lean on their shovels all the time, smoking cigarettes. When the cave-in came and all the houses sank a couple feet, the company sent men around to fix them. Jacks raised the house. In Jim's lunch pail was something I'd never seen before: apple pie. He gave me some. and it was delicious. They all laughed as I ate it. I was down there one day working on my model airplane when my father came down the stairs and told me they were taking her. He was crying. He kissed me on the cheek. The bristles tickled. They were taking her ...

Wan, smiling, "Good, isn't it?"

"Very good, but very—"

Now Wan leaned toward the Liberated man.

"You know, I've had a full report on your behaviour in class—your very first day in class—"

. . . *headmaster Wan* . . .

Lingering in that position, looking steadily at his man, who said nothing, utterly nothing, lost in the fantastic bliss of the cigarette's lulling heaven, following the blue smoke cloud.

"... you to know," Wan was saying, "I am ashamed of you." Silence.

"Thoroughly ashamed."

The voice of doom.

"Do you want to land up with that riff-raff Up There?"

Marty was interested.

"Where's that, Colonel?"

Dreadfully, "C."

"C?"

"The—Reactionaries—"

He drifted with the smoke . . . *they used to roll their own those guys on the WPA . . . my father worked with them a while when it really got bad . . . around Franklin, that new highway . . . where Keeler has his big house . . . how many collieries did he own? what a place . . .*

The Colonel: "Good for nothing . . . incorrigible bourgeois scum . . . Flotsam . . . moral imbeciles . . . intellectual pygmies, constitutional defects . . . *Thoroughly Bad Lot* . . . Our policy is the Lenient One. We seek to improve your Daily Lives and to show you the Good Life. We do not murder prisoners. Your side does. Have you heard of Kojé? That is an island off the south shore; your side keeps our prisoners there. Do you know that one hundred were killed there the other day? Yes, that surprises you, doesn't it? Or perhaps it pleases you? They are packed on there like sardines. You will hear a great many

more things in the course of your stay which will surprise you. Because they are the *truth*. That always surprises. You won't believe it at first. But you will come to see. You are not really *rotten*. This is *not* for you . . ."

Marty was puffing away . . . the smoke billowed . . .

Wan became more intense.

"But, now—that little classroom incident . . ."

The pain returned. He had forgotten it. If only he could stand up. Maybe that would—

"Are you listening?" Pause. "Good." Pause. "You must recognize your Error. You must exercise Self-Criticism. That is your only hope."

The cigarette would soon be finished . . . *Maybe he'll give me another . . .*

"Very interesting, Colonel."

"Good."

"Very."

"Excellent."

. . . come on, you bastard . . .

Silence.

The cigarette case had snapped open. An offering . . . He accepted it. And the light . . . *ahhhhhhhhhh . . .*

Smugly smiling Colonel.

"Thanks a lot, Colonel."

Now, leaning back, Wan said, "We are not Savages. This is not a German concentration camp."

Silence.

Waiting.

Smoke rising.

The Colonel put out his cigarette in the tray, slowly, methodically. Not a spark was left.

"Go back. I will give you a further chance to Rehabilitate.

Go now . . ." So patiently.

He rose and showed Marty the door.

Hot end knocked off cigarette and stump in pocket .

SLATER was outside waiting for him. He felt like throwing up.

"Hello, buddy—takin' me back now? That's a good ol' buddy. Hey, have any mail from home recently? How's everything? Ol' mom send her love? Wifey? Hey, what does she have to say, Sport?"

It looked as if Slater might go for it this time. Marty braced himself. But the man backed out. Sourly, he said, instead, "Aw, fuck."

Marty purred, "What's the matter, boy?"

"What you tryin' to prove?"

"Prove?"

"You'll see, buddy, you're headin' for a rough time. Wanta be like them British bastards? Some a them been in a hole six months."

"Long time, Sporty. How long you been in one? And how about the rough time you're headin' for? Wait'll you see me in that witness chair—time of my life. They'll cut your balls off!"

"Don't make me laugh, stoopid. I got news for you—"

Marty, walking along with his pain, said nothing.

Slater drew a big breath. "Maybe I won't be goin' back. What you think of that, bright boy?"

"I knew you had brains, Buttercup . . ."

"I'm telling you, man, your attitude is lousy."

"Yeh, but listen, if you stay behind you have to resign from the Army. Man, that's a helluva lot of paperwork. •You better start workin' on it right now—Wan'll help you—take a coupla years at least. ."

"You know what, wise guy? You're gonna wind up in one a them holes—you wait and see—couple months there and we'll see what kindofa smart guy you are—yeh—I know one British

bastard what's off his nut now—listen, buddy, you get in a hole and you've had it. Those guards don't fool around. They piss in there and everything—I bet that's where you wind up, buddy!"

"Well, I better be a good boy then. What do I do, Sporty?"

It looked as if it had come. Slater was going for it. Marty got ready.

But once again, on the brink, he pulled back. He stopped, cleared his throat, and spat.

"Here's your goddamn hut," he muttered.

And then, spinning on his heel, he was gone. Marty watched him . . . *trotting straight to Wan . . . the bastard . . .*

Inside, most of the men were sprawled around the floor, on their mats. Some were reading books. Others were talking. They looked up as he entered, then, seeing who it was, went back to their business. He saw Hopkins coming towards him, just as he was carefully lowering himself to his mat.

The big man bumbled around.

"How you feelin', Sarge?"

"Hurts all over, Jesus Christ, all over."

Shifting his weight, big man.

"Well, uh, that was a hell of a thing, awright."

"Think so?"

"Been doin' lots a thinkin'."

"Good man."

"I wasn't one a them, ya know—"

"Thank God for that—i'd be dead by now—"

Big man smiling. He came a little closer, kneeled, and finally sat down beside him.

"After I seen that—honest to God—to hell with the classes. To hell with them guys. What a hell of a thing."

Marty looked up at him from his mat, and for just a moment, smiled.

"You got a black eye, ya know."

"I can feel it. And lots more."

"Any bones busted?"

"Don't think so."

"Where you been just now?"

"Guy named Slater took me to see Camp Commander. Colonel Wan."

"Yeh? He's a big deal, ya know."

"Know him?"

"Had occasion, once—"

"Good cigarettes."

"You ain't kiddin'."

They were quiet.

After a while, Hopkins whispered, "What you think a that Slater?"

"First class bastard. Never get outa here alive."

Hopkins shifted.

"Yehhhhhhhh—been thinkin' that—yehhhhhh—but it ain't gonna be one a these jerks doin' it—Ha—look at 'em—willya—"

He turned, slowly, to look at them. They were all hard at work on their books. Asking one another questions...

"Study hour, Sarge—"

Marty watched the big man. He knew things were stirring inside him. Hands working. Arms tightening. He felt the forces within him. Something would happen. Through his pain he wondered and waited. Hopkins was moving, getting to his feet, and now facing them, he shouted, the full power of his voice filling the hut, startling all of them.

"Hey—jerks!" The students turned to face him. "Hey, ya listenin'? *You're a rotten bunch of yellow bellies!* I quit as your squad leader! You kin tell your buddy Slater! I ain't even gonna be here in a couple days—maybe even today! *Stick your classes and books up your asses!* UP YOUR ASSES! Yellow bastards! And if ya wanta try somethin', c'mon, here

I am—I'm awaitin' on ya— c'mon—"

Silence. Absolute silence. Only staring. The big man was waiting, breathing heavily.

Nothing happened. Some with mouths open looked this way and that, at one another, or back to their books. Others moved away to the windows, to the far corners . . . Scraping of shoes . . .

"*Fuck you! Fuck you all!*" he roared . . .

Nothing.

After a while, he turned to Marty and sat down beside him. Marty grinned. "You sure don't do things half-way."

Hopkins was quiet.

Marty gave him the remains of Wan's cigarette.

"Thanks, buddy, Jesus," Hopkins murmured.

Marty said, "You better watch out now. They might get you while you're sleeping."

"Not this bunch—"

"Maybe we ought to take turns standing guard tonight—just in case—three or four of them might help—"

Hopkins agreed, finally.

They were quiet a long while.

"I remember when the officers were still here—" Hopkins said.

"When was that?"

"Not too long ago—took 'em away—couple were on the ball, tried to get things organized—Jesus! Guys just told 'em to go fuck. Yeh, I mean it—everybody did what he felt like—in the end, they gave up—just before they were pulled out—'cept one guy, little guy—Captain. 'Course most of 'em—tell the truth—just as bad. Chinks lapped it up—goaded the men on—not that they needed it . . ."

"Too much ice cream."

Hopkins thought hard about this. "Yeh, yeh, oh yeh . . . Always wondered about that—combat troops—what the hell for—'course, I always liked it—tell the truth—you—but what

for—what—”

“Morale, buddy . . . Sure wish I had some now though—”

“Morale?”

They grinned.

“How about some chow?” Hopkins asked. “You hungry like me?”

“What’s the treat?”

“Diacon soup—rice—”

Marty thumped the mat.

“Just what I wanted! How’d you know?”

Hopkins went for the food. Marty was thinking of Moriarity. Jackson, Up There. He wondered what it was like. He knew he was going. He was sure he was going. Soon.

Night fell quickly, like a curtain suddenly slammed down. They had found four whom they felt could be trusted. They worked out a plan. Two would sit up while the others slept. One to check the attack, if it came, the other to rouse the sleeping four. Six of them could deal with any attack, Marty thought, even if it came *en masse*. Not a very likely happening, but possible, just possible. . . . *There’s not enough guts in this crowd for that, they’d never get off their sacks to do that; they have to stand a couple hours first, in the heat, and have guards all around, and cheerleader Big Ears . . . maybe one, two, three at most . . . I know them . . . oh, yes, I know them . . . that one with the rat-face—if he closes that book suddenly some day he’ll take his nose off sure as hell, take it right off . . .*

A light was flashing. It was not his dream. In the doorway. He knew that at once. It swept the room. Two men stood behind it. It moved over the sleeping men. It came to rest on him . . .

“Him,” Slater said, pointing at Marty.

The night was cool, and Marty shivered. His recently dis-

turbed sleep was heavy upon him, beckoning return to its dreams, and solitude and peace. He did not speak to Slater, or the guard, who, in fact, spoke no English, the rifle poked frequently into Marty's ribs being his only means of communication. He was too sleepy to care. The other pain, besides, was still with him. It had started to ease somewhat, but was still with him. Chilly night air working its way into him, waking him. Helpless rage. He knew what awaited him. Another session. He wanted to take the rifle and wrap it around the guard's neck and strangle him with it. The cool air suddenly alarmed him. He realized its meaning: winter was coming . . .

It was the same building, but another room. Neither Ching nor the Colonel. A large, ugly man was waiting. The first truly ugly Chinese he had seen . . . *I didn't think they came that big . . .*

He wore the uniform of an officer. A pistol lay on the table. Not within Marty's reach . . .

He grunted something, looked up from a folder he had taken from a drawer, and pushed the pistol to one side.

Slater went away, taking the guard with him. One bright light hung from the ceiling, within a black, conical shade. The light it cast encircled the two men, and left the rest of the room practically in darkness.

Marty was afraid . . . *This will be rough . . .*

"You are Landi, M., Technical Sergeant, U.S. Army, Service Number 1432876."

The man's voice was harsh, hawking, as if he would spit after each speech. The accent: American . . .

. . . this man is not an exponent of the Lenient Policy . . .

A hand came down on the desk, slamming hard and loud, shaking it, jolting the pistol up and down. . . *that must have hurt, oh, sweet Jesus that must have hurt . . . maybe he'll break it before we're through . . . I hope so . . .*

The bull-voice, gagged with rage, "You are—*stupid!*" He really did spit this time too, to his right, in the general direction of what Marty hoped (out there in the darkness) would be a spittoon.

Silence. The man placed his elbows on the desk and leaned forward, just enough so that his ugly face could be perused more clearly, each fold and line of it, the wide, violent mouth, the broad nose, the gold teeth, the foul breath . . . *and the sweat of a bastard* . . .

Yet, bizarrely, even in his fear and loathing of him, Marty felt sorry for the man. He was so ugly.

"Will you confess?" the man muttered, fixing him hard with his gaze.

Silence. He met the stare, returning its hatred.

"It is absolutely essential that you confess. You will write it out now, here, for me. Tomorrow you will read it before the class."

Silence.

The man reached for the drawer. He nearly tore the desk apart pulling it open. He brought out pencil and paper and slammed it down before Marty.

He sat back in the chair, waiting.

Marty did not move, staring into the ugly face, the pencil and paper before him, untouched . . .

After a while, the man slammed his left hand to the desk. "What's the matter with you?" he yelled.

Marty decided to answer: "I'm sleepy . . ."

The man was furious.

"Ha! *Sleepy!* That's all your type ever thinks of! Sleep, food, sex. Listen—don't you realize what you have done? Don't you see that you have disturbed the entire class, perhaps even taken them off the road to the Good Daily Life? Broken the rhythm of their steady progressive cognition of the Truth? Don't you see you owe it to them to Confess? Don't you see

what a *bastard* you are being to your buddies?"

Brief pause.

And then, Marty, quietly, "No."

"No? Nevertheless, *you will confess!* Do you hear?
YOU WILL CONFESS!"

So screaming, he slammed both hands to the desk. It seemed like the whole room shook. Marty thought: *that must have hurt like a sonofabitch . . . ah few more times and there's bound to be a fracture . . . keep it up ol' buddy, keep . . .*

He was launched, as from a catapult: "The Chinese People's Volunteers have gone through great trouble setting up these schools for Liberated members of Capitalist armies. We feed you clothe you, *better even than our comrades the Korean people!* We supply you with first-class Instructors, books, advisers. We have combed the entire China to find sufficiently skilled people in your tongue to come to these camps. We have gone through incredible trouble. And *you*, Stupid insignificant fool that you are, *you try* to smash it all up, wreck your buddies' chance to learn the Truth, to start *thinking* for the first time in their slothful disgusting lives, to emerge from the moral and intellectual sewer of your Society, to open their eyes, to breathe the clean, Fresh Air of *truth!* *Stupid Fool!* You don't deserve any Leniency at all! You are hard-headed, perverted, *disgraceful!* You spit in our faces. *But you will confess!* Oh, yes, *you will!* *You will!"*

He leaped out of his chair . . . *Tarzan* . . . He seized the pencil and paper, waving it furiously before Marty's face, and then, suddenly, exploded a terrific punch into the face before him, sending Marty sprawling backwards with his chair, tumbling, spilling all over the floor . . .

The blow stung and stunned him, but falling over with the chair, feeling the floor flying up to strike him, set off an urgent • alarm, bringing into action manoeuvres learned over the years, now automatic. He fell away, rolling quickly, away from the

heavy boot coming down over his face . . . *Oh baby you have had it . . .* He leaped to his feet, eager for battle. Savagely, swiftly, he slugged the man with a hard judo blow on the neck, then a left hook to the stomach, then another judo blow to the neck, and then a powerful right cross flush on the mouth . . . *I can't give you anything but love baby . . .* He felt teeth give way. His hand was cut by them . . . *I hope he's swallowed them . . .* crisp autumn days . . . *signals . . .* quarterback spinning, handing off to him . . . *faking . . . turning now into suddenly opened hole . . . through . . . bouncing off line-backers . . . spinning, twisting . . . away . . . heart racing wildly . . . a roaring . . . away . . . away.*

He was sick with the effort now. But he had to hang on, he knew, planning his next move. Unnecessary: the man lay crumpled over his desk, bleeding profusely from the mouth, hands clutching his stomach . . . *Is he dead, buddy? . . .*

The door of the room burst open. Two guards were there. The room was suddenly lit brightly from the hallway. He saw, quickly, just before blackness erased everything, *there was one*, and he said it, babbling. "There's the spittoon!" laughing helplessly . . .

The guards stood there a few seconds, surveying the damage. Then, they attacked the falling man, knocking him to the floor, dealing blow after blow with their rifle butts . . .

. . . Jesus holy Christ in heaven on a blue white streak of lightning streaking a million miles an hour to nowhere and me on the blue white streak in the moonlight serenade of serenades the most beautiful song I've ever heard in my whole holy life on the blue streak flashing with it under the sun and over the stars . . .

Hopkins and Paulic were sitting up when they brought him back.

That had been accomplished by dragging him on a sort of cart-without—wheels and then dumping him like a sack of potatoes outside the door of the hut.

The guards went in, flashing their lights.

"Now what the hell?" Paulic mumbled.

"I dunno. They brought somebody back though. Marty, betcha. Duck under the goddamn blanket. Sleep ..."

The light flashed over them. It went elsewhere. They could hear them kicking someone awake at the far end of the hut. A drowsy, frightened voice answered. Fragments floated their way.

"... Laverick? Hell, no ... not here ... *me?* Your'e CRAZY Jacobs ... *Wrong hut* ... what? .. Place—wrong ... *No! NO! JACOBS MY ... HEY ...*"

Nearly everybody was awake soon, grumbling and arguing with the guards.

Hopkins was laughing under his blanket.

"Hot Dog! I'll be a sonuvabitch! Hey, Paulic, how 'bout that?"

Rough, hoarse whispers.

"Franco, Buddy—how 'bout that ..."

"The greatest—"

"They'll be confessin' all over the place tomorrow—poor bastards—"

Franco said, "Who the hell's Laverick, anyway?"

"I dunno. Never heard of him."

"They got the wrong hut."

"Sure they do."

"They'll confess anyhow."

"Sure they will."

"A shame they had their beauty rest all fucked up."

"It's having those Reactionaries in here what does it."

"Yeh—wish they'd clear them all out—"

And they were laughing, peals of laughter ...

The squabbling and squawking at the other end went on for a long while. Everybody in the hut was now awake.

At last, the guards left, taking away a man. It was not

Laverick. No one had been able to convince them. He screamed and screamed as they dragged him out.

"What's gonna happen to them dumbos when their boss finds out they got the wrong guy!" Hopkins was gleeful.

Paulic muttered, "The ball bounces right sometimes ..."

They leaped to their feet and went outside. Marty was there, barely conscious, moaning. They carried him carefully inside. They dug out their hidden candles and matches. Hopkins whistled softly, a long whistle ...

"They really clobbered him ..."

"Get that pail of hot water ..."

They sponged him off and stopped the bleeding after a while. They covered him with several blankets. The other men in the hut had not moved from their mats ...

He was groaning.

Paulic, softly, "It's us, buddy ... you're back in the hut ... take it easy now ... you're O.K. ... O.K. ... easy ..."

After a while he went off to sleep ...

Hopkins turned to Paulic.

"Find Terry. I'll sit up a while here with him."

"What a deal, huh?"

Franco, quietly, was murmuring, "What in hell's gonna come of us?"

"Get Terry now, O.K.? Get him over here," said Hopkins, softly.

Towards dawn they came for him again. He was barely able to stand between the guards. So they half-dragged and half-pushed him the long way to their destination. On the horizon he could see faint streaks of light, and he could smell the old, wonderful smell of dawn ...

A different room. It seemed that way. He could not be sure. His head throbbed with each heartbeat. Every part of his body seemed to ache. He tried to make sense out of things. A face swung before him, this way, that, now fragmented, now

coming together, now fading ... The room was well-lit, but tiny. He tried to sleep. He wanted so much to sleep, slip under the blanket of peace and darkness, forget everything, even the pain ... He wondered who the face belonged to. He tried to fix it. He strained his eyes, making a great effort to keep them on the bobbing face before him. A name came to him. He heard it. *Ching*. He was relieved, not knowing why. But also afraid. He tried to stay with it, sensing danger.

And Ching's soft, kind voice, saying, "Where have you been? What has happened to you? You look a mess."

To scream . . . or burst into hysterical laughter . . .

He managed, "Lenient Policy— it's the—you—"

Ching, so kindly, halted him: "Ah—ah—what have you done? You've been a bad boy. You must have been a bad boy. What was it? Tell Ching. Come—" . . . *a wave in the sea rolling . . .*

"All I wanta do is--sleep--"

The voice caressing him, his infant "Never mind. I know, I've heard all about it ..."

"Leave me—alone—sleep—will ya— hey--will--" and then, "Willie Willie ..."

"I'm so sorry, truly, but that's something I just cannot do. I wish I could. But consider what you mean to us, and you'll see."

Now he was admonishing his child gently ...

"You should not have angered the Major—he's a very--sensitive man—"

How he said it, he would never know: "So—I noticed—"

"Yes, so you did—and I'm sorry to see all this happening to you—truly—such an intelligent fellow— we had a fine talk the first time—do you remember? What's happened to you? Oh, I'm so sorry, so, so—"

"So—kiss—my ass—"

He was burning within, and falling ...

"Don't you see? Don't you?"

"Bastard—dirty bastard—dirty—"

"Don't you see your error? How with your error you keep us up all night, worrying about you, hurting us, and yourself, mark you, while we try so hard to help you, racking our brains how to do it. You are rude to our Major—that poor man—poor great man—I do believe you have disfigured him for life. Do you realize you knocked out all his front teeth? *All*. He is in the hospital, in a terrible state—"

"The gold ones?" he mumbled, hanging on, the information pleasing him, lifting him slightly.

And Ching's voice, now heavy with sorrow, and concern. "Now they will court-martial you ..." Pausing. "That makes you happy, does it? Which? The court-martial— or—the teeth? Yes, I see—the teeth—why—why should that be? He has tried so hard—that great, good man—you have driven him to the lengths of despair—why don't you confess? Don't you see? Your classmates are suffering. You suffer. We try to guide you. We do not want to beat you up. You drive us to consternation. We want to help you. We are not savages. This is not a German concentration camp. Why can't you see that? Why?"

No answer, only the man before him, swaying in the chair . . . He offered cigarettes.

"Smoke?" So tenderly ..

No arm reached for them.

Gently, Ching went on, "When the Major came to, he was saying, 'I have failed, I have failed.' You should have heard his heart-rending cries! That great, sincere man! • His heart was broken! His mouth was broken! And all on account of you! Who knows, now, what will become of him? Who?"

...hoot ... who hoots ... owl hoots .. who ...

"I'm so—goddam sick —Ching—tired—sick and—"

"So you are, I'm sure. And why? Because you refuse to

accept our help. You have no gratitude. You spit in our faces. You throw up all we give you. Did you do that at the breast? Yes, I'm sure you did. You cannot stand gratitude. The feeling offends you, repels you. You would rather die than feel gratitude. There, that's the trouble. We must concentrate on it. You are not a bum—you have neither of the two things at the core of every Reactionary: sloth and anarchy. No, your trouble is elsewhere. Do you want to hurt me? Yes, I'm sure you do. But note: in the long run, whom will you be hurting? Yes, *you know*, I see you know. Who pays the price, in full? Somewhere, within you, you must know that. There is a part of you that knows. Otherwise, you would already have been asleep. You want to prove me a liar, you want to show the whole world what a bad man I am—"

Marty was listening ... Hearing (as if for someone not even present), "Just as you did to somebody else—long ago—long long ago—"

Marty was mumbling, half-falling off the chair, recovering himself just in time, swaying, "I don't wanta confess—no—not a damn—goddamn thing—leave me alone—leave—you cunt—you—leave—what I say—you—leave me—"

"Yes, alone," Ching said, pressing in, "that's what you want to be. Always, all through life. The whole of life. Alone. Never allowing anybody to help you, unable to feel the gratitude you should for help. Yes, alone, duped, seduced, this way and that, kicked around, spat on, made a fool of. Do you remember? Yes, I think so. Why don't you confess? Things would be so much better for you. We shall respect you. Your comrades shall respect you. We can go on having our talks—many, many talks—you want that, don't you? You and I together, O.K.?"

"Just—let—just—*Jesus!*"

"Jesus—yet—yes, that's it—"

"JESUS!"

"That's what you wanted them all to think—wasn't it?"

Sweet Jesus! While she—”

“JESUS!”

“Long, long ago—do you remember? If you saw photographs now of her, would you remember? What was her face like?”

“Her face—”

“I mean, after you got through with her—after you let them all know—Sweet Jesus—”

“Just—let—just—”

“You smeared the town with her—didn’t you—. Didn’t you?”

Falling.

“Didn’t you? While you were—*Sweet Jesus*—didn’t you?”

“LET ME—”

“Yes? Yes? Let you?”

“Let—”

He was unable to finish, the blackness enveloping him swiftly ...

He fell off the chair. The floor rushed up, hitting him. He heard the thud of it hitting him.

A HUNDRED miles an hour . . . going where I can't even see the lights . . . two hundred miles an hour and faster on a long highway stretching . . . a clarinet in the night the blues bass thumping away there in the background . . .

...Day. What day? Dawn. What dawn? Voices screamed in his dreams. Intermingling, fusing. He no longer recognized a single one. They hurled themselves at him. Ranting, gnawing. *So many times . . . they have come for me so many . . .* The days turned into nights and the nights into day. Dawns broke and spilled their light onto a world which no longer divided itself into any meaningful sequences. Yesterday was today, tomorrow now. Jolts of pain shot through him. He tried to remember where, how that had happened . . . *What had happened? . . .* Something had happened . . . *you just don't have pain from nothing . . . do you have a fever? . . .* Again and again they had come. The Ching-face bobbed before him. And—her face . . .

It was colder . . . *I can feel the cold . . . it gets into me . . .* So time had passed. They had not stopped it. It had gone on and on, carrying him with it, indifferent, utterly, to his misery . . . Was it night? or dawn? was it real? a dream? *Am I dead? in Hell?* now and in the hour, holy Mary . . . *who said that?* He tried to pinpoint the voice, one voice . . .

"The summers must have been lovely "

Ching.

"I said—"

"I heard you!"

"But do you —remember?"

Silence.

"You must have gone for walks Those summer nights there
---so lovely, for walks-- "

"Oh, yes, Ching. Just peachy."

"Where did you go, then?"

"Oh, yes, Ching ..."

"What did you do, then?"

"Oh, yes, Ching ..."

"You have it within you ..."

One voice. *Where have I heard that?* It spoke to him of his life. What was his life? ... *what is your life?* ... *I have travelled so many days ... my heart has beat so many times ... I have smelled so many sweet smells ... her sweet smell ... my love's smell ... was it a dream then?* *I can remember ... in my arms in the soft warm night which caressed my town, in the quiet of the breeze which stirred only the smallest of leaves in the trees towering all about us ... I can remember ... Was it real then?* ... *pressed close to me and your heart beating against mine until I could not tell whether it was yours or mine ... in the sweet smell of the warm summer night when I held you ... taking of your lips, drinking of them, and your breast ... fresh smell of dawn ... she was my love, and I hers, and all nature ours, for we did not exist at all as ourselves anymore, but only as part of the night, limpid and lovely, soft night ... and then, gone, ... her face before me ... a dream then ... her name ... her life, fused with mine ... where? where did it start?* From nothingness whence you sprang, so doomed and damned are you to return ... out of the unknown chaos of the uncharted aeons, heritage after heritage, change after change—before me ... one cell, two cells, four hundred cells ... four hundred thousand million billion cells... moving... changing... climbing... seeking ... feeling... groping... suffering... dying... lost in numbers destined in calculable, meaningless, infinite... *Where was I fashioned? What is this flicker? Why can't I know? In some way, out of Nothingness I sprang and developed, to pass the flicker of a moment called a life which in its living seems an*

eternity of agony and yet on reflection is utterly utterly nothing... light of an instant... sound of a split second... banging futilely along the endless corridor of time... why? WHY?... I, who can breathe can hear my heartbeat and cannot hear so many other things... then I will die, never knowing... ignorant as I was the day of my conception within her... and those who are within me whom I have carried with me have been part of me will vanish too... I will have been... I may then still be, but only in the minds of those who have loved me... there, in their minds, their memories, I will live... and my memory will nourish them... as the memory of her nourishes me... she was a red rose... that opened and received me and filled the night with love scent... in her mind you would have lived... had she... she was the night, the fusion... in that fusion commenced the agonizing climb out of nothingness... emergence out of lifelessness... in that fusion, somehow — phantasies of unknown aeons, back to endlessness itself, formlessness... When I can no longer see her or feel her or hear her... my heart no longer beating, my brain absolutely still, and my blood frozen in my veins, then I am dead, dead, and she too finally, utterly non-existent... this body, this whole being that is me, that I love and care for so much, that she loved so much, that I have struggled so hard to maintain... she taught me to maintain — in a state of aliveness... utterly, remorselessly, indifferently destroyed, completely and for all time... Nothing, absolutely nothing... unfeeling and unknowing forever and ever ... putrefaction and decay... chemicals, rotting flesh... and later, bones, dust... atoms... atomdust... Nothing... back, back to absolute stillness, indifference, unknowingness, which at your core always, even in living, has haunted and directed you and to which you are doomed, damned, absolutely, to return... you and your kind...

- In the dark, exhausted, he lay. Enfolded by time. He tried to sleep. When would they come? His heart hammered... it

won't last, it will burst, I will have inside my chest a ruptured heart, spilling my blood all over my inner world, and if I sleep, they will come... if I don't sleep, they will not come... I will grow weaker... I will see things that are not there at all... My guts hanging on a sycamore tree waving in the moonlight bayed to by wolves in the night... out of my belly ripped by hands seeking justification of principles akin to the flooding of dawns upon a cold, undiscovered planet, whirling somewhere in a space not even dreamed of...

Ching's sad, kind, devil-priest-face, hung disembodied before him... *When have I last eaten? When did I last piss a stream into that hole in the ground?...* His heart was hammering... The sounds of the night, mingled with the sounds within... *Who is Moriarity and who is Jackson and who is Paulic and who is Franco and who is Terry and who is Hopkins and who is she?...*

"Will you confess?" Ching was saying softly.

Always there before him.

"You see, what is happening to you? Is she there each night? And does she tell you?"

"I am the night..."

"You are the night!" Soft laughter. "No one can see you, if you are the night—not even—"

"Forget it!"

"Oh, how you'd like me to..."

"Forget it! Cunt-mouth, Forget it!"

"Oh, certainly, we will all forget it. Will she forget it?"

"She—"

"Come on, now."

"Who—"

"Who do you think?"

"No! I never—how—"

Gently mocking, "You never—who else did you think? *Haa* someone else been coming here with you?"

. someone else...

"You really ought to confess..." Tenderly...

A thousand miles from nowhere. Noises in the night. ...*the hammering, though dreadful, assure me I am alive... and if I am alive, she is alive... can you hear? I am screaming across millions of miles of nothingness that separate you from me, and the atoms and electrons will part and carry my voice to you... When last we talked, the music lifted us... until we floated away from everything... just you... and I... Do you remember...*

Franco. Yes. Now he knew something ... Franco was gone. When? He did not know... *But I know something...* He had a terrible fight with two of the guards. They had tried to drag him out of the hut to class. Was he with Moriarity? Hopkins? Jackson? Paul. Paulack. *Paulic.* He would be here. Unless something had happened since... *Jesus, since...* It could have... Anything could have... *Time has died.* Someone was up, walking about. To the latrine. His belly must be sick. The men slept, and slept. He heard their breathing. Occasional moaning, turning, talking in their dreams... Seeing full-breasted women, wet, open genitals, and going into them, sliding, faster, faster, deep, deep within them... ecstatic within them... violently orgasmic within them . . .

The winds will come down from the North. They will kill us. All of us. The ground will freeze so that you can't even cut into it. *When they took her... Where's the ice cream?... how will it go with millet... when last have I had that? They will come again... tonight... He will be there... my angel, did you hear, he will be there again, trying to tear you from me, out of me...*

• *Where's the fuckin' ice cream?*

He was whispering.

"Paulic, Paulic, Paulic ..."

The figure next to him awoke.

"What's up, buddy?"

"Talk to me, please talk to me ..."

"They ain't comin' tonight, Marty, the heat's off ..."

"What is tonight?"

"Wednesday?"

"Jesus, Paulic, you make my guts scream—"

"Well, I don't know, buddy—"

"Who does? Who the hell does?"

"They do ..."

"Think so?"

"Were you dreaming?" Marty asked.

"Jesus—"

"Were you?"

"Ching's after me—"

"You were dreaming that?"

"I dunno—"

"You can't. That's my favourite one."

"Hell, maybe I get outa here tomorrow. He was hintin' around about that ..."

"You never told me."

"You was sleepin', buddy—Jesus—what you take me for?"

"He likes me. I'm here forever. He'll drive me batty—"

"Hell, he'll go first, Marty—"

"You think so? You think that?"

Silence. * Night aging.

Paulic said quietly, "What you thinkin', buddy?"

"The bastards coming back again—"

Pause.

"What's else?"

The night, carrying its silence ...

Paulic: "A doll?"

...Carrying its silence... her body... white... brunette hair... petting her white body... she would sigh with happiness... her breasts spreading, when she lay on her back... firm, pink nipple in his mouth... her voice, urgently, whispering to him: more, take more, all of it, darling, for you, it's for you, all for you... It was a dream...

"Better sleep, buddy," Paulic said.

...in every part of me. She is me, I don't need eyes. When she speaks I am part of her voice. She is my voice. And yours, Ching, doesn't stand a chance... not a chance...

Time, even in the instant of fruition, passed, lingered not even long enough for him to know that they had (would) come. For they had (would). Mark that well. For they have (will) come. Ching? I hope so... if they must come, let it be Ching... where is the pistol? What has he done with the pistol?... when they fire, you will charge and stop only when you are down... DOWN, DOWN, YOU BASTARD... willingness to participate necessarily precludes withdrawal... for they will come... when you are down, for that is the principle, you try to move forward even if you are down... you inch forward... to be alive... that is what...

CHING sat there, and said nothing. He looked away from Marty, now and again blowing smoke from his cigarette, and then turned to him.

There was no pistol on his desk.

"Where's your artillery?"

Ching, so happily, smiling.

"Well, you know, I had a long talk with the Commander about that. We came to the conclusion that it would not longer be necessary in a certain number of cases."

"I'm one of them?"

"Yes"

Marty sat back in his chair, sighing, rubbing his face. Great mats of beard under his hands.

"When you going to let me shave, Ching buddy?"

Ching puffed languidly on his cigarette.

"Ching, you give me a pain in the ass."

"I try to do my job."

"Well, you're making one hell of a mess of it. I bet I look like Crusoe."

"Who?"

"Crusoe. Robinson Crusoe."

"I see."

"Well, good, oh, good."

"How long have we been seeing one another now?"

"How should I know? What the hell day is it? What year? You've killed all that for me. Anyhow, you let me sleep a couple days—didn't you? Look, I'm not even falling off your goddamn chair. Now, when you going to let me shave? C'mon, don't be such a bastard!"

"Yes, but look who creates all these difficulties. You do.

You bring them all on yourself, your utter contempt for me, based on your fantastic envy, ingratitude—"

"For the five millionth time, Ching, send me Up There. What the hell you keep fooling around with me for? Everybody else has gone now. What the hell you want with me? I'm not interested."

"Everybody else?"

"Everybody worth something!" he said angrily.

Silence.

The cigarette case extended. Marty took one, and a light.

"Because I believe there is hope for you. We all do. Even that poor Major whom you have disfigured for life feels that. Yes. Have you seen him recently?"

...dreaming or insane... He wanted to explode, laugh hysterically... But he sat there, quietly looking at the smoke curling from his cigarette, and, occasionally, at Ching, there, waiting for him...

"Your behaviour has been dreadful. And yet, we all know it could be exemplary. You may have been wondering about your court-martial. I must warn you, some of my colleagues are pressing for it, particularly the Major—"

"You going to be my character witness, Chingy?"

Piqued.

"I frankly told them that that was not the way. Right now, yes, this very minute, they are thinking it over, talking it over."

Clouds of smoke were rising.

"No fooling, Ching, are they?"

"Yes."

"Well, look, tell me—when the hell do you guys sleep?"

Ching smiled, saying nothing. A knock at the door. Someone brought two steaming cups.

"Do you like coffee?"

Marty looked up quickly, but said nothing.

...I hope he gives me one...

"Well, here is some, do have a cup."

...do oh do...

"I didn't realize you guys liked the stuff."

"Not usually. I personally like it very much. All those years in the States—one acquires a taste."

"Sure, like I'm acquiring one for birdseed."

Ching laughed.

So good to taste. He puffed the cigarette and held onto the smoke a long time, then slowly, let it flow out of him.

At last, Ching said, "Well, then, tell me everything."

Marty burned himself with the coffee.

"About what?"

"Anything. What's on your mind?"

"A good fuck."

He wondered if that was a blush.

"Come, now, what's on your mind?"

He felt so sleepy, suddenly. The coffee warming him, cigarette lulling him, Ching boring ...

"Why don't you let me sleep?"

Ching puffed his cigarette.

"All I want, Ching, is to be left alone. Send me up there with the rest of them—Moriarity, Jackson, Hopkins—if that's where you've sent them, that's where I want to go. That's all. Now, how about letting me sleep?"

Ching, silent.

Then, "And do you want to die?"

"No. I just want to be left alone."

"Isn't that a form of death? How long could you exist alone?"

"If you sent me up there, I'd be alright."

"What about your court-martial? What if you are found guilty and sentenced to solitary confinement—how would you like that—all alone—perhaps for months"

"Let them. I wouldn't be alone—"

He checked himself, suddenly startled at what he almost said, so easily, so quickly. He wondered what he might have told him during all the interviews. He was frightened.

"You would have ..." Gently, pausing, looking steadily at the man before him, "Her."

Dropping it into him.

Jolting him.

Marty's heart leaped suddenly.

...because I have told him. When? I don't know. Most certainly must have... how much more? how much?... you'll see...

"Yes," came the Ching-voice, quiet, knowing.

Marty said nothing, tried meeting his gaze.

"Your mother," said Ching, softly.

"Your grandmother," said Marty.

Ching's voice, pressing, "Perhaps so—but it's *your mother*".

Marty said nothing. He puffed the cigarette, blowing smoke upwards, watching it billow, hover ...

He was frightened.

Ching gently launched another.

"When did she die?"

He swallowed the smoke abruptly, and only through great effort kept from choking, coughing. His heart was hammering.

He kept quiet.

Ching, sipping coffee, waited.

He began to calm down.

"She's not dead," he said quietly.

"Oh yes she is. Don't lie. Why do you lie to me?"

"You are the world's worst bastard."

Ching sipped more coffee.

"Yes. Yes. A bastard. But you lie to me. How many lies have you told me? Can I believe anything you've told me? Do I keep things from you? Think a minute. Have I lied to you? Don't you feel guilty? You're covered with guilt. When

did you last tell the truth?"

"Oh, for Christ's sake!"

"Yes, we are back at that again—Christ—only now, slightly different: *you've* taken all her sins upon yourself, and now you are Christ in *that* way—"

"She had no sins! She was sick!" he blurted out, and in the next moment, amazed, wondering how it had happened, hating himself, and Ching.

"Yes."

Silence. Absolute.

Ching went on, "Yes—shoot it all into me—overburden me with it—then you'll be scot free! That's it, isn't it, isn't it? That's your aim, isn't it?"

Silence.

"But, do you know how you feel? You never would admit it, even to me, would you?"

And then, like a dart, "How did she die?"

A gulf opening.

He started to fall, but held on, grimly.

"She's not dead."

"Now it's so heavy, so heavy, you will topple over with it, your guilt—"

Hanging on.

"Let me go back, Ching, let me shave—"

"You can't shave it off! *You can't!* Don't you see? It will be with you always—always—" Ching insisted.

"Will you kiss my ass? Will you?"

He was desperate to get out of there. Ching moved in on him.

"Spitting, always spitting! Just as you used to spit all over her—did you not spit all over her?"

"Go to hell!"

"That's where you sent her, that's what you made her life, with your attacks, your contempt—"

"Let me go back—shave—bed—"

"You've been shaving it all your life—"

"Bed—"

"Haven't you?"

"Bed!" he screamed at him.

Did you sleep in her bed?"

"Bed!" he roared, knocking the coffee cup to the floor.

"How old were you?"

"BED!"

"How big were they?"

"Goddamnit!"

"How do you like the coffee? Is that how you used to knock her breast away? Is that it?"

"Let me go back!"

And then, silence. He let it take him. The silence lulled his pounding heart. He started to slip from the chair ...

Ching announced solemnly, "You are piled up so high with guilt—"

He struggled to stay in the chair.

"I'll bet you're thinking of her right now, aren't you? Even as you, who think you are Christ—oh, yes, you certainly do—walk around with all that guilt—all the things you've done to her—what keeps you going? What keeps you from killing yourself?"

The coffin was suddenly before him.

Open.

White coffin.

"You make me sick," he said.

"Naturally, I tell the truth."

He waited, watching his man, swaying there before him.

"You must confess," he said quietly.

"You must go to hell," came the answer, barely audible ..

"You think by spitting on me, knocking me away, sending me to hell, you don't hurt me? You think that doesn't add to your guilt? Just how much do you think you can bear? Even Christ

--listen—I stay up all hours with you, worry about you, try so hard to find the right way—I'll let you in on a secret: it's not easy working with you—do you think it's a pleasure? Who makes it so? *You!* By denying me, cutting me, as you did to her—"

"Shut up!"

"—and—guess who? Yourself!"

"Marty's my name."

"Yes, playing games—"

"Do you mind if I sleep in this chair?"

He was slipping.

"See how contemptuous you are! See how you spit on me!"

"Why not? You're a bastard—"

"And was she a bastard? And are you a bastard? Who made you a bastard?" And, "What do you do with this bastardry?"

"This—?"

"You heard me! You try to put it into me—as you put it into her—"

"Crock of--crock of --shit—" he mumbled.

"Exactly! You turn everything I say into shit! Yes, and isn't that exactly what you did with her? Isn't it?"

"Damn—fine—cigarette—Ching—"

Ching, quickly, leaping in, "You're straying all over the place. An old trick of yours I'll bet you used to love games. Your whole life is a game. You can't bear to face anything. *Anything!*"

Marty said nothing. He felt sick, all over and through him, deep inside ...

"You realize I can do so much and that's all. If you just sit there on your backside I can talk until I'm blue in the face. You must know that. How many times have we met? Do you know? I can tell you—"

Marty was falling ...

"And you've wasted all of them! And what do you expect to

gain? You think you're so clever! In the end, you will pay. Dearly. I cannot interfere in your court-martial. Do you think I will be the one to suffer if you persist in your appalling attitude? You make a shambles of our sessions! You're not even here! Just as you weren't when she—"

"Sleep—let—me—"

"How many have you wasted?"

"Fifty—"

No answer.

"A hundred?"

No answer.

"Twelve hundred thousand one hundred fifty-five and three-quarters?"

"Very funny. Very very funny! Go on, giggle! It's so funny! And all the time: *Never stopping to count the cost to yourself!*"

Both silent. Marty, coming out of his weariness momentarily, looked up into the Ching-face.

"What you got up your sleeve, no kidding, Chingo?"

"What do you think?"

"I'm asking you."

"You even try to put it up my sleeve."

"*Jesus!*"

His eyes were closing. The voice of Ching came to him in waves.

"Are you sleepy?"

And his own, mumbling, "No, hell no, *no!* Ol' buddy Chingo Lingo Wingo Tingo, hey, watch, hey, look, look, I—"

"Have some more coffee."

A fresh cup. And where had it come from, he wondered . . .

The hand of Ching before him. He saw it, the hand, the cup there too. He was swimming . . .

"Drink your coffee."

The voice far-off, gentle, soothing . . .

"You know whose hand that is?"

A voice answered for him, "Uncle Tom—Uncle Tom Cobbly's—"

A thunder clap hit him, "NO! It's my hand! The hand that cares so much for you, wants so much to help you! And what do you do with it? *Bite it right off! Yes! As you did with her life!*"

He wanted to scream. The light swayed ...

...When would it... why couldn't the blackness take... where... only the hand... only... her life...

Down the long, long tunnel he was falling ...

"I'm really—I—gonna fall—right off—I—Ol' Chingy—now—gonna—"

Swiftly, "How old were you?"

"Seventeen."

"What happened?"

"She—"

A blinding lightning flash within, staggering him. The words were vapourized.

Fully awake now and enraged. He wanted to take the Ching-face in his hands, rip it to pieces, tear flesh from bone... And then, a greater rage, with himself... *He wants to ravage the depths of me. Sacred, sacred depths of me. Oh No, Ching. Never, never, Ching...*

He held himself in check.

Ching, aglow, watched carefully ...

Waiting.

"Let me out of here—I want to go *Up There*—"

"You cannot bear the truth."

"Let me the hell out!"

"Yes—yes—always—out . . Who pays the price in the long run?"

Silence.

Ching lit another cigarette. Leaned back, puffing slowly.

lovingly ...

A job well done ...

Finally, softly, "You realize there's little I can do if they decide to try you."

Marty, barely there, mumbled, "Who asked you to ... Just one—thing—lay off—send me up there—someday let me out of here—alive—I'll be grateful. I go my way, you yours O.K.? Sound O.K.? Too much to ask? What you want my blood? Why? Who am I? Let me—"

Ching watched him, pulling long on his cigarette ...

The smoke, a cloud at first, spreading, swirling, embracing the light ...

Marty watched it. So many patterns, crisscrossing in and out of themselves.

"Very well, that's all for now," Ching said gently.

It was a room he was entering with his father and sister. In the city. They had been driven to it in a big, black car. From their new home, in the shade of big elms and maples. They had moved there from Trent Street. Bought with the savings of work in the mines. The room was filled with coffins, everywhere except for little aisles between them, where one could walk, view, select. The coffins were empty, and he knew now, even in the hot mist which enveloped him ever since getting the news yesterday, they were looking for a coffin for her. His father's grief ate into him, weighed on him, pressing him down. He walked with difficulty. His sister's face was tight, fighting the tears. They passed one after the other. Occasionally she stopped before one... they used to go shopping together, most Saturdays. He stifled the memory... But it returned: he and his sister in town Saturdays—around the stores—she would stop and look at so many things. If she had the money, she would buy them all. She bought his clothes, choosing very carefully. Her darling brother... White, all white. Beautiful red satin inside. Com-

pletely open. If she lay in it—the words suddenly fell on him with full meaning: When she lay in it... Staggering him. His father, beside him, caught him. His sister turned, and saw him, there, in his father's arms... There were tears in her eyes, and now her hand was on his face, and it got wet, then turned hot, hot and white, so white that suddenly it exploded brilliantly, violently, disintegrating everything before his eyes, and a voice behind the whiteness, having no connection whatsoever with his father or the room which had in fact at that moment of her touch completely vapourized in the blinding explosion .. a voice having no meaning, none at all, making guttural noises intermingled with screeches and hisses, a voice so primitive and bestial that he was sure an animal was loose in the room, on the prowl, after him, tearing at him, into his side...

"What -- what the hell-- you --want--"

His own voice said that as he looked directly into the blinding light. He knew someone would be there, behind the light.

The kicking stopped.

"Take that fuckin' light out of my eyes, you sap!"

He reached out, swinging viciously at the source of the terribly painful whiteness ...

The guard was not expecting this, and the light was knocked out of his hands, clattering to the floor, throwing beams wildly all around the room, dancing light beams, all around, as it rolled and rolled, finally coming to rest before some man, focusing directly on feet wearing an old pair of boots sticking out from under the blanket ...

The guard was frightened and stepped back, swinging his rifle to the ready, jamming home the bolt, Marty heard the click.

Orders chattered, Marty groaned, got slowly to his feet, stumbled out of the hut ...

"Try," said the Ching-voice, kindly.

"You must try," it repeated.

Marty struggled through the dark pain to rise to himself, to hold up his head long enough to say to him what it was he wanted to say ...

"Go take a fuck, Ching, go take a fuck straight in hell."

And then he was far away, suddenly, swiftly, as Ching sighed.

"What time did he used to come home? Surely you remember that—I mean, when he worked day shift—"

No answer.

And then, so softly, "When did she start the business about the mine roof?" Pause. "It must be so clear in your mind ..."

In the night ...

...He heard his mother moving about the kitchen, making the sounds he loved so well, while she prepared supper. She was humming a tune. It was from an opera, he had been told that. It longed for the past, the golden past of happier days. ...He wanted to cry. And touch her, kiss her. He wanted to do something to make her happier. She wanted to be in her own country, with her sisters, aunts, cousins. She always talked about this. He crawled out from behind the coal stove. She saw him and smiled, though he could see the moistness in her eyes. He felt his love for her, warm as the stove. "How long have you been there, little mouse?" she asked him, picking him up, kissing him many times. "Not too long," he answered, trying to keep back his own tears. She kissed him all over the face. He was very happy, thrilled. Yet he wanted to cry. Suddenly, the screen door opened. A very black face appeared. "It was his father home from the mine, covered with coal dust. He ran to him, but was afraid to touch him, for he might get dirty. But he was so relieved to see him again, home from work, safe...

In the night...

She was screaming. He awoke with a shock. His heart was

pounding He could hear the clock on the bureau ticking. She was saying, "Fall on him, crush him, bring him home crushed to me," and crying... He was terrified. His limbs began to quiver. His stomach was tight, and sick... His father was working tonight. He would not be home until perhaps midnight. From the chamber to home was a long walk, at least two and a half hours. He couldn't go back to sleep. He couldn't possibly...until he came in... safe, alive, once more . his strong, beloved father .

In the night...

He saw the garden. His father cared for it so lovingly. After he got home, when he was on day-shift, he would work a long time in the garden. In the springtime he dug the ground with a fork, turning it over and over. Then he sowed the seeds, and planted the young seedlings. The plants grew well. He would watch over them, tying them up, weeding, spraying, hoeing. The wonderful bean and pea plants. Some summers there would be tall sunflowers smiling down, seeds so tasty, all inside the pregnant sunflower. He would work in the garden until it got dark. Then he would go down to the cellar and take a shower. He had built that himself, as he had the whole house. .

In the night...

He thought of his father in the mine-womb. It had snuffed out the lives of so many. But when times were good, even fairly good, it was steady work, and good money. All for the family. Never taking a vacation. No drinking, or smoking. Sometimes all of them took in a movie. A dream came back to him. An old dream: his father's arms had been blown off. They had brought him home. The stumps were bleeding. His mother was screaming. And he was crying. His dreams, hopes, plans of better things for the family, through his hard work, were ruined, utterly. The family, to which his whole life was devoted for which his sweat and blood ran...

"Buddy—"

Fragments of the dream still clung to him even as the voice united with the face and he tried to think of the name, for there would be a name ...

"Marty—Marty—"

Paulic. Morning. Early morning.

"What's—going —on?" he managed.

"They're takin' me now—I hadda tell ya —Jesus. I din't wanta wake ya, but I hadda tell—"

"Good luck—buddy—I'll be seeing you—soon—pray that —will you—Jesus—what they doing—"

"Sure ya will—I'll see ya—bet we all will—I gotta now —guard's waitin'—"

"Good luck, buddy ..."

...now there is nobody...

Paulic was soon ready to go "I'll be seem' ya soon, wait and see—"

"Yehhhhhhhhhh ..." he heard his voice, drawling out, mournfully.

And he was sinking, far into the darkness ..

... You cannot sustain me, you cannot.. He heard their voices speaking the tongue he had first learned. He saw donkeys plodding patiently in the hot August sun. Dry land, in the dream stifled even at their inception —for you cannot sustain me, you! ...

"... Why don't you tell me?"

He asked Ching that because he really wanted to know. It was so awful not having any idea about time. It could be years or minutes. He felt that if only he could have some idea about time ...

"Why don't you know?" Ching replied.

"How'm I supposed to?"

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"Oh Christ in Heaven above!"

"There it is again—*Christ*—"

"Let me alone! Goddamn you anyway! Let me—"

"Like the rest of them? Your father—sister? Didn't they all 'let you alone'? And they're still inside of you, 'letting you alone'—*impotent*—and that's what you'd like to do with me— wouldn't you, *Christ*?"

"Shut up! Bastard!"

"Yes, yes, shut it up—your guilt—yes --"

"SHE WAS SICK—"

"Yes, yes, so she was—"

"Then let me alone—"

"As you left her alone? As you *made* her alone?"

"She—"

"With your jealous, cruel, envious attacks - you couldn't stand anyone being near her talking with her—all to yourself you wanted her—you imprisoned her-- your guilt--"

"My ass!"

"Your guilt..."

In the moment, which for him meant nothing, he fell ...

He was in a room, their dining room in the Trent Street home. She was in the room, sitting near the radio. He saw the arch of the doorway leading to the kitchen. It had once been a plain doorway, rectangular. His sister had begun to say how nice an arch would go there. He had taken it up. Together they had nagged their father into altering it. A man was there. It seemed to him the face was familiar. He couldn't be sure. But in any case, he hated it, for it was talking and talking with his mother. What right had he to do that? She was annoyed now by something he had said. It was about the little town they had both come from, over there. There were no romantic memories about it for him. He hated the place. It had meant only poverty and hopelessness.

She was defending it. Very firmly and very politely. She was taking the role she had played back there: the daughter of a better family dealing with a low peasant. Now he knew who the man was: Ching. He was sitting there, quietly, smiling, listening. He wanted to rush with his whole body against him, one powerful lunge, crush him against the wall, smash him, once and for all, for provoking her, for daring to speak to her ... He was an old friend of his father's. She never did like him around the house. She didn't really like any of his friends. Back there, they were all beneath her. Crude, simple, vulgar. Their relationship would have been a purely formal one. Here, it had entered her very home. Time immemorial: they had moved in the circle of their own family, relations, in the great old stone house, once a castle-fortress, dominating the little town on the hill, there in that land of loving, parching sun, overlooking acres and acres of olives and vineyards, once, long ago, all theirs ... Ching, looking at her with that disparaging little smile, said now, "It was a miserable hole, and you know it." She was flashing, suddenly, but then gained control, for the moment sensing something of his past and the life he had known there. Their conversation turned to other things. It became almost friendly. And he hated the Ching-man even more now. He felt that behind the friendliness was a cunning and blackness as old as time itself, as low as the caste from which he had crawled. The man left, at last, unable to wait longer to see his father. His mother now set about preparing the table for his father's supper. He watched her. Short, sharp, cruel looks darting at her. His father came home. They heard him downstairs. The shower was running. She avoided his looks now. She dropped a plate, and his chance had come: he began to berate her. The fury of it disorganized her. "Why do you talk with him? Always you talk with such a man. Wasting time. Time-waster! And now you've broken more dishes. You knew he was coming any minute. Why did you waste time talking with that man? Why can't you look after

your own family? Can you tell me? Time-waster!" And more, much more, hurled at her with furious speed and cruelty. She started to sob, talk swiftly, desperately, as if to figures not even there, appealing to them for help. And then, to him: "Am I not free even in my own home to speak with whom I please? In my own home? Am I completely your slave?" and on and on, choking now in her sobs, until it no longer had any real connection with the present, but turned into a mournful invocation of the past, dead loved ones, her mother, father, sisters, all who had cared for her so tenderly, back there ... He stood before her, petrified with fear and shame at what he had unleashed. He wished in some way he could cancel all he had said, done. He knew he was the cause. Of this—and so much more. But now he began thinking, unable to bear the pain of his insight: She is like that. He repeated it to himself, again and again. Soon he he was almost convinced he had had nothing to do with it — she turned her attack now on his father, who had come up quickly from downstairs. She called for the rocks of the mine to fall on him and crush him, liberating her, sending her back to her beloved family, village, country, where she would find love, respect. She called for her mother and father to save her, to take her out of the hell her life had become in the magnificent new country. She fled upstairs. She was pacing the hallway there, chanting, moaning, repeating the same phrases over and over again now, calling her loved ones, damning the mine her husband... but nothing, now, he noticed, about himself... He was sick with horror. He wished she were not like that. His father questioned him, but he dared not tell the whole truth. He was never asked in any case for more than he volunteered. His father would say, usually, "She is like that." They went up to her. His father talked to her, pleading with her. She struck him. Finally, several hours later, they persuaded her to go to bed. Even there, her voice almost gone, she went on and on, the same phrases, same damnations, pitiful calls to the past, the

golden past ... The aria from the opera went through his mind. He heard her voice, as on that day, so many days, soft, lovely, melancholy, singing it ... They had to call the doctor, at 2 a.m. He didn't want to come, but finally, a half-hour later, he was there. He talked to her, quietly. He tried to get her to take some sleeping pills. But she heard nothing, saw nothing, save the terror within her, the voices within her becoming her own, there, in the night. He managed to give her the pills. It was another hour before they had any effect. She mumbled occasional phrases even then. She was hanging on, fighting the blackness. At last, she slept and the doctor left. His father sat by her side and Marty could see his sad face in the dawn light ... He went to bed. But sleep did not come. He felt sick. He began to tremble, sporadically at first, then more violently and frequently, until his whole body was one uncontrollable spasm. His father came to him after a while. He stroked him spoke tenderly to him. Later, he lay with him, seeking to calm him. When, at last, a few hours later, he did relax and the trembling left him, an overwhelming sense of despair took him

DAY He turned to the day. Cold. *What day? How many more? When does it end?*

Slater bounced into the hut during the break. The men had just come back from their class. Marty had watched them filing in from where he lay.

They would come. As always ...

The men avoided him. They were all solid Progressives. Much back-slapping with Slater. A great distinction to be visited by him. Something was up.

"Hello, ol' buddy!" said Minichello, standing near Slater's elbow, practically holding hands with him.

Weinstein said, "Slater, ol' buddy, how ya doin', huh?"

Buoyant Slater: "Awright, knock it off and I'll tell ya all about it, see?"

Minichello, gleefully, "Oh, boy—here it comes—listen now, buddies—"

Someone yelled, "Pipe down, for Christ's sake!"

Marty lay there, watching and listening to them as they went on. He could have been a piece of furniture, or a straw mat. And he thought: I am not too tired this morning. They must not have come for me for quite a while. Perhaps a whole day. I am hungry. I must have slept all night. They are due. Sure as hell they are due. Tonight.

All was quiet. Slater launched into a speech.

"Now, ya see, there's a couple things I wanta say to ya. First and number one, the Commander's very very happy on account of the progress you guys in this hut been makin' with your studies. Fine reports from your Instructor. Only one study group ahead of you guys, and that's the bunch in 24. O.K., hold it—now listen—here it is: We're gonna start up a Camp Newspaper. And

I gotta have some help. If you can write, so much the better. I mean articles and stuff. Then we gotta have you guys to do stuff like settin' it up, runnin' it off, distribution, and so forth. It's a *good deal*, believe me. I been workin on it a long time. Good experience for when you get back to civilian life."

The voices buzzed.

Finnegan piped, "Count me in, ol' buddy."

Wakefield: "Me too, Slater, hell, I kin write like a bastard!"

"He got a fuckin' Palmer's Diploma!"

They laughed and laughed.

All but one or two had something to offer in the way of talent.

The new project was well on its way.

Slater beamed.

"O.K., hold it up! Listen! I'll give the names to the Colonel and he'll figure out who's gonna be on it, see? Can't take everybody, but we'll sure as hell try. Anyway, you can always be a contributor—bits of news, stuff, letters from home—don't worry—I'll get everybody I can on the thing."

"Hey," Finnegan said, "we still hafta go to classes then?"

Slater turned on him, frowning, "You think you know it all, buddy?"

Finnegan grinned sheepishly, and slouched about.

Minichello edged closer. "You the—Editor—hey?"

"Yeh."

Awestruck.

"Boy, you're the wheel in everythin' around here now."

"Listen, men, there's somethin else, see? Tobacco ration goes up a couple ounces next week—official."

Weinstein, soon joined by the others, "YAHOO!" various whistles and whoopees all round.

Slater brought it to a halt.

"Also—winter clothing and blankets to be issued on Monday, '10 a.m. sharp. You got that? You'll hear more about that tomorrow at Commander's Call—"

Copeland muttered, "About time."

"Gettin' pretty goddamn cold, Slater ol' buddy," Pickens said.

Slater didn't like it. "Shutup. You two fuckin' guys got nothin' but bitches anyway. Also, listen—one more big thing, men—hey, you listenin', Wakefield?"

"Sure I am!" He was indignant.

"Well, stop housin, around."

"Goddamn it, buddy. I was listenin' with both ears and asshole."

"Mostly asshole," somebody said.

A few laughed.

Slater, to Wakefield: "You think I'm gonna take that shit from you?"

"You better confess, you bastard!" Minichello said.

A chorus, suddenly, "Confess!"

Wakefield sighed, humbly. "I confess to givin' my Chief here a hard time, and I'm a first-class bastard for it, and I recognize my error and weakness, hangovers from the days when I was nothin' but Capitalist Flotsam."

"*Capitalist flotsam!*" Minichello echoed.

They cheered.

"Awright, *none a that!*" Slater yelled. "How many times I gotta tell ya? When a guy confesses, **KEEP YOUR MOUTHS SHUT!**"

"Otherwise, what's the fuckin' point?" Minichello added.

Sporadic murmuring, some laughter.

"He means you, stoopid!" someone said.

Slater said, "Awright, awright!" And to Minichello, aside: "Lookit, keep quiet when I say something. O.K. buddy?"

"Jesus, Chief, I only ..." He was very hurt.

Slater, whispering, "I know, buddy—but just keep quiet."

Minichello pouted, moving away from him.

Slater continued. "Anyhow, here it is—you guys ever gonna let me finish? Listen: There's gonna be a big parade two weeks'

from now, see? Big Deal—Big Shots from the USSR coming. Everybody marches and we gotta make signs and stuff. Minichello, get paper and pencil out. The signs you gotta make gotta say 'Peace.' and 'Out With The Capitalist Warmongers!' and 'Korea for Koreans!' and 'GIs—don't be Suckers!' and 'Down With the Capitalist Big Pigs!' Got that down, buddy? O.K. All signs to measure at least six feet by two feet. Awright, awright. Equipment and stuff to make them available now, and you'll be hearin' more about this tomorrow too."

They were all talking, all stirred up, gathering about him and then, Slater, surveying them like a football coach before the kick-off. "Now, fellas, I just wanta say this: you're all doin' a great job, and we're proud of ya, the whole country'll be proud of ya, too, some day. The whole world'll be proud of ya. And I guarantee, now we're Wised Up, we're gonna stay Wised Up the rest of our lives. We been played for suckers long enough. We been fed so much bull and crap and baloney back in that land of hot air that we didn't even know a spade when we saw one. And that spade was what the dirty Capitalist Warmongers used to throw us into this Criminal War with. Now, thanks to the lucky break we got bein' Liberated by our Chinese buddies, we're climbin' outa the bottom of the stinkin' pile of bullshit we been under all our lives. A little daylight comin' in! See it, fellas? Ain't it wonderful, fellas? Fresh air! See? Keep it up, men, keep pluggin'! Keep workin' hard! We're all in this together, and don't let any of those Reactionary bastards Up There-- and this one watchin' us on his ass over there--piss around with ya, tell you any different, take you away from the Right Way. Fellas, you know we're on the Right Way, at last, after all those years! Those easy, crazy days when all we hadda do was sit on our butts and watch sexy dames wiggle their curves in our faces are over, now and always. Or sloppin' up 'deer in some joint or other, watching lousy TV and all that. All over now. We're waisin' up, and it's no thanks to the Big Pigs who

run the U.S. Army. What they ever do for us? Put a gun in our hands and some food in our gut and send us off to shoot poor, dumb Koreans! Pretty good, huh? Well, they like dumb GIs. Because for them a dumb GI is a good GI. The dumber the better, so long as you can fire that gun straight. The Big Pigs want you to be dumb! Fellas, *fuck 'em!* We're on the ball now, and let's stay on it!!! Keep busy, study hard, stay on the stick!"

He paused. They were all gaping at him with silent admiration. Minichello eased his way up to his side again.

Slater went on, "Now, men, before I go, I just wanta know: any bitches? Questions? Suggestions? Speak up now, nobody's gonna hurt ya, don't worry."

They shuffled around a while. Then Wakefield ventured, "Hey, Slater- I just wanted to ask ya - what about the chow?"

"What about it?"

"Well, uh, this millet and corn's gettin' pretty goddamn stale, ya know."

"You just ain't a-kiddin'," Pickens muttered.

Finnegan said, "and what about some meat, Slater? Tell the Colonel that, buddy, no kiddin'!"

Many of them harped on that one.

Slater quieted them.

"Don't worry about the chow! Already it's as good as any Korean gets. Hell, as good as the guards get. You realize that? Awright, hold it well, it's gonna get even better. I talked about it with the Colonel just this morning. But just keep rememberin': we're eatin' as good and sometimes better than the people the Big Pigs sent us over here to destroy. Think about that. Get it through your heads. *Us* eatin' better than the people the Big Pigs sent us over here to destroy. Think about that and think again. You still want better chow? Meat? Chicken? Spaghetti?"

No one said anything.

He went on, "I know you, Wakefield, you goddamn glutton.

I personally feel too damn ashamed askin' them for anything for myself. You worry about the food your mind gets, that's the important thing. Anyhow, the Colonel said he's gonna make it even better. Another thing, our goddamn planes are flattenin' everything that moves or stands up north of our lines. *But Everything!* Thousands of innocent people—you seen 'em—being made homeless --and you seen what homes they had too —*Jesus, you seen them*--while we sit on our fat asses gettin' the best what's available--you seen them, the poor bastards—think about that. Fellas, the chow's gonna get better awright, but just give a think to everything I just told you. Our Chinese buddies are doing all they can for us, bendin' over backwards to give us a break *What the hell, they coulda shot us, long time ago!* Instead, lookit all they done for us--we oughta get down on our fuckin' knees and thank them for the one and only break we've had in our whole lousy lives!"

Minichello murmured, moving even closer to him, "That's what I say, Slater."

Many other voices now approved his words.

Then a general shuffling around, coughing, clearing of throats. Minichello said finally, "Hey, Slater, there's one thing here, buddy—"

"What's that?"

"Well," and he lowered his voice somewhat, "that jerk over there—"

He pointed out Marty, lying on his straw mat, wrapped in his blanket.

"Uh huh--"

"Well, what about gettin' him moved outa here-- O.K.?"

Wakefield added, "Yeh, what the hell's the idea havin' him bunk here all this time anyway? How come Ching didn't send this ass Up There with the rest of 'em? Hell, nobody ken sleep here. All fuckin' night long they come for him. Nobody ken sleep anymore around here."

Finnegan said, "Get the sonuvabitch shipped Up There, will ya? With his buddy Paulic. He got his ass shipped out day before last or so—when the hell was it—"

"It's a fuckin' disgrace," Weinstein muttered.

Minichello, louder now, "We're pretty pissed off, Chief, and I ain't gonna guarantee what the guys might do about it."

Mutterings all around.

Slater finally said, "Hold it!" And then, knowingly, "Fellas, how long since he was called out last?"

Consultations about this.

"About twelve hours, we'd say," Minichello reported.

"O.K. Listen: he won't be here much longer. No, not much longer. I can nearly guarantee that. You got stuck with him because Ching, the Colonel, everybody wanted to give him a break, 'cause they figured he might of been a good man—"

Laughter.

And then Finnegan said, "Well, let's hope it's soon buddy."

"Damn soon," mumbled Wakefied.

Slater looked them over. "Men, don't worry about it. There is a real example of a hard-head and he's gonna get what's comin' to him, don't worry."

"Reactionary bastard," Minichello muttered.

Slater: "Take it easy. He's gonna get taken care of, don't worry."

"Lookit him," Finnegan said, "makes ya sick!"

They muttered about it a while longer.

Then Minichello chirped, "When's this newspaper deal startin' up, Chief?"

"Couple weeks. I'll letcha know."

"I know ya will, Chief."

Baker sang out, "What about the mail, Chief?"

"What about it?"

"Well, last time you said it was gonna start comin' in regular—"

"When'd you last have mail?"

"Two weeks ago."

"What the hell you bitchin' for then? You ever stop to think where the hell you are, man? Think of those planes swarmin' all over the place, shootin' up anything that moves! Think about that!"

Voices of approval, shuffling of feet, nothing more. The meeting broke up. Slater moved about the room and talked to small groups of them for a while. Then he walked over to Marty. He leaned over him, saw that he had gone back to sleep, and began shaking him by the shoulder. Marty stirred, yawned, looked up into the face.

"C'mon, outa your sack."

"What the hell you want, Buttercup?" he answered yawning, rubbing his face.

... here we go again ...

"Colonel wants to see you."

"Jesus, that's what you said last time! Don't you get bored with that line, buddy-boy?"

"You're a real wise guy."

"Yeh, I know. Anyhow, I feel pretty good this morning. They let me sleep a whole night through, I think. Pretty big of them, huh? Don't you think so? I sure like this Lenient Policy, Sporty."

"Boy, you think you had it rough well, wait till you see what's comin' up for ya. No kiddin', how come you're so damn dumb? Don't you know the score? You got all the guys in here pissed off. They're just about to let you have it, in case you're interested. You're damn lucky I came along, ya know."

"I know. Thanks a lot, ol' buddy. Hey, can I go to the latrine before we take off?"

"Go on, wise guy."

Behind his cigarette case waiting for him sat the Colonel.

Smiling affably. Impeccable as ever. A friend indeed.

"Well, well, you've had a good night's rest, eh?"

"That's a fact, Colonel."

"You think we have a reason, eh?"

"Absolutely, Colonel."

The voice was less friendly.

"Well, you're right. As of today, we wash our hands of you. We have had long consultations about it. We have been forced, regrettably, to conclude you are Reactionary material. You will join your friends in 'C'."

A great weight seemed to lift from him. His whole body relaxed. He could have kissed Wan.

But also, a certain fear ...

The Colonel waited a few minutes. Marty said nothing.

"Well, what do you say about it?" Wan said, finally.

Cigarettes at the Colonel's elbow. Marty stirred in his chair.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Why should I? You're glad to get rid of me, I'm glad to go. Leave it at that."

The Colonel was smiling. Marty was surprised. He even reached for the cigarettes and offered one. Marty was thrilled.

"Thanks a lot, Colonel. You can come up there with me if you want to—no kidding "

Wan didn't like that.

"You are a damn fool, Landi. I hope you know that. Why don't you Confess and stay here?"

Marty sighed, lost now in the cigarette's luxury. He puffed long on it, letting the smoke go all through him ...

And then he said, "I thought we were all over that."

Again the Colonel was smiling. "Where there's life--"

"Yes, yes, that's what I say—and there sure isn't any down here—no, Colonel, not one damn bit—I'd stay if there were. I'm no damn hero. You think I'm a hero?"

He puffed the cigarette. They sat in silence.

He enjoyed it, right to the end.

The Colonel said then, "Alright, go now."

Marty got up, put the remains of the cigarette in the ash tray, and went out. A guard was waiting ...

SECTION C was located about one mile north of the main camp on a strip of land that jutted right into the Yalu. It was enclosed in barbed wire. There were guards only at the main entrance.

He soon found Moriarity, Kowatski, Jackson, and the rest. They had a big reunion.

"I hear they really put you through it, man," Moriarity said. He had grown a chubby beard.

Kowatski said, "They'll forget about ya here."

"Jesus, they better."

"Sure they will. They forget everybody here. This is the end a the line, the dumpin' ground, buddy," Moriarity boomed.

They fed him and set him up in their hut. Then they toured the section. They ran across many familiar faces. He was especially glad to see Paulic... It was not always easy recognizing them under the beards most were sporting.

There were about ten huts in all. Mud and wattles. A road zigzagged in and out of them. There was a larger hut at the far end, right against the wire. It was in better shape than the others.

"That's Headquarters," Kowatski said, "they ain't been there too long though. Only since the place started fillin' up."

"They don't bother us," Moriarity said, "and that's a fact."

Kowatski went on, "It sure is. Not a damn thing to do but sweat it out—and stay alive." And, after a pause, "Winter's comin'—"

"Just around the corner..."

They were silent a while.

Then Marty said, "They say anything about issuing clothing, better stoves?"

"Not so far. Who'd tell us anyhow? Guards don't talk English - officers who come once in a while just don't talk, period."

They walked along in silence.

They came to an area that was not unlike a ball field or parade ground.

"That your stadium?"

Moriarity said, "That's about the size of it. We been tryin' to make a half-ass baseball and football. Not much luck so far though."

A while later, Kowatski said, "Marty, don't think all the guys around here are O.K. Some been planted by the Chinks to keep their eyes on things. Guess it saves guards that way."

"Little sweethearts," Moriarity said.

"Ever find them?" Marty asked.

"Sure."

"They have accidents. Sometimes bad ones. Puts them in the 'hospital' long time," Kowatski said.

"Sometimes permanent."

They were at the end of the handle. The river was before them, and to the sides of them.

Moriarity murmured, "They say it freezes solid in winter. You can walk right over it to China."

"Now there's something always been my ambition," said Marty.

He turned to look at the hills behind him.

"That where you get your fuel from?"

"Yeh," said Kowatski.

"Hell of a ways--"

"Yeh. . . I know."

They stood there a while, looking ahead. Behind them, the river rolled by...

Moriarity said, "One more thing you oughta know about. Guy named Phillips--lives in the hut across the way--"

Marty waited.

"Been around a lot—maybe more than twenty years—all Infantry—Master-Sergeant—reserve Major—"

Silence.

"Tough ol' bird."

Kowatski urged, "Go on. Tell 'im."

A little pause.

"Well, buddy— hates the Chinks like poison rats even more—great organizer—sidekick named Harry—yeh, and another, Jenkins—hell, whole bunch under him—they really pull some deals. You'll meet him soon."

"And Harry," Kowatski added.

"Yeh—Harry—"

"One of his boys'll come for ya—"

"He'll say it: 'Phillips wants to see you.' Like he was God, or sumthin'."

Marty asked, "What's his act, anyhow?"

"Well, I'll tell ya— one of his favourite little deals is goin' down there at night—ol' Slater's Alley—pullin' couple of 'em outa their sacks—lettin' 'em have it—talking to 'em—"

Marty whistled softly. "Jesus, the Chinks must love him! He gets away with it?"

"So far. Nobody talks, that's why. These guys he takes with him—Ranger types—almost like him—I ain't kiddin'—you think they sent them up here on purpose?"

Hopkins said quietly "I wouldn't wanta tangle with 'em."

"Gonna get Slater, he says. On his mind all the time. That'll be a good one, huh? Bunks right with the Chinks, ya know."

"Well, good luck to him. You know Slater? I had couple run-ins with him."

"Gone, huh?"

"You got to see it to believe it, man."

Kowatski said, "There'll be Hell's own price to pay if he does do it. I wish he'd lay off. What's he want, a medal? I'll tell

ya something: I don't mind not even givin' in to them one inch—but playing hero—listen, Jesus—what's the point, huh? This fuckin' hero. Those jerks down there won't change on account of him beatin' the piss outa them couple times. The way I see it: keep your nose clean, stay alive, sit tight. That's the way I see it."

They were quiet. After a while, Marty said, "That's the way I feel about it, buddy..."

They were sitting near the stove. Jackson was poking around with it.

Marty said, "I saw the whole 2nd Division stopped in its tracks by couple snipers firing from a hilltop. Know what happened? Every damn weapon in the column turned on the hill. Nobody ordered it, they just did. Somebody called for an Air Strike. Enough stuff was poured in there to wipe out a regiment. I think they got them. One good squad could have gone up and cleaned it out, using maybe couple grenades. Things got a little better. Ridgeway and all that. What's the good of equipment if you got jerks using it? Look what the Chinks fight with!"

Jackson and Paulie got some supper ready. Millet and soya-beans. They all gathered around with their bowls, filling them, emptying them, refilling them...

When the sun went down the shadows emerged quickly and smothered the few streams of light lingering in the west. The shadows linked and night came, enveloping everything in its blackness and stillness.

The stove threw flickering blades of yellow light here and there. The men on their mats spoke to one another a long time. Some of them fell away into sleep this way, the words of their last sentences still on their lips, their partners waiting in vain for them. They too would have to sleep now. Or lie quietly. Or, sometimes, try talking to the man on the other side, unless he

was talking to his partner, or sleeping. But for the most part these new conversations soon burned low and died, for each man had his favourite talking-partner, and if he fell asleep it did not seem possible to get in tune with a new one.

Kowatski had stopped talking. Marty was suddenly aware of this, and wished it were not so.

"Hey—buddy?"

Only silence.

And other voices, murmuring, all around Occasional laughter.

Finally, "Yeh?"

"Thought you were sleeping."

"Just about to."

"Well, take it easy."

"You too."

For a while he lingered in the border region of sleep-non-sleep, voices-shadows, flesh-dream...

... It was a large, lovely mansion. He had wandered in and got lost and now was searching for the exit. He entered a large room, luxuriously furnished. Red tones. It was deserted, save for a woman who lay on a white bed, overhung with gold curtains. She lay quietly. Her eyes were open. He watched the rising and falling of her breast. He drew closer. The sun was on the bed, blood-red, late afternoon sun. His heart was thumping. He drew so close he could hear her breathing. His knees trembled. She was so lovely. White face. It was—he couldn't be sure—he had to come closer—his breath came with difficulty—now he was sure—it was she . . .

Kowatski was thinking about things... The corner pool room suddenly popped before him. He was chalking up his stick. They were all laughing at him. Dopey Joe was mumbling, "Join the Marines, buddy, you got the stick for it, yeh man."

They roared with laughter. He ignored them—had to, or the shot would muff. That's the way they always did it. It was like a rule. You just had to forget about it and bend down and take aim and shoot it true. True blue. And if you did it, they would shake the place down with their hollering, and even all the big boys in the back would come running out to see what the hell was going on. Kowatski tried hard to keep it hang onto it. But it was fading. Now darkness, and outside in the dark, dogs howling. *Fuckin' hound dogs*. What the hell were they howling? Carlucci's pack, waiting for Spring. Up in the Poconos he'd run with them. Just listen to all that howling. The stupid jerk. Fed them enough only in Spring. Rest of year too goddamn drunk. Red Nose Mike, oh boy, Mike, great hunter Mike. Now it was Annie. He was dancing with her. **Honey, did you know I'd wind up here?** Oh, Jesus, *here?* Oh, honey, the car lights cut through the night. The fog and the rain. The bridge was all dark in the night. Bill Rayno fell off it one night. They fished him out, two miles down, the next day. Who the hell knew how it—State Troopers all over the place. Annie, one more dance with me, *please...*

Daylight. Everybody was up. And this morning, for the first time, they were shaking with the cold. There was not much said as they went about their tasks. They knew winter was not far off now . . .

Kowatski said, "Jesus, I hope they come through with the clothing."

A stranger had entered the hut. He looked around, and then came toward's Marty.

...Phillips. No, one of his boys. Yes...

The man was before him.

"Howdy."

Marty grunted a greeting.

"I'm from across the way. Jenkins my name."

They shook hands.

"Phillips wants to see you."

Marty shifted around, near the stove.

"What for?"

The man looked at Kowatski. But said nothing.

"Well?"

Finally, "He just wants to see you."

Only silence.

Kowatski broke in, "He'll be over—after a while."

"That right, Landi?"

"Yeh."

And, "Tell him I can't stay long. Mucho work here—"

Jenkins didn't hear. Or didn't care. He was leaving...

They were going up to the timberline this morning. But first they ate.

A little man burst into the hut. His voice startled everybody, though most had heard it before. It was like a circus barker's.

"Hey, listen, you guys!"

Many of them looked up

"Hey I'm not kiddin'! Listen this is straight from the horse's mouth!"

"Which end?" somebody yelled

"Hey— I'm not kiddin'! Listen— the peace talks have started up again— what you think about that, huh?"

"Go to hell, Joe."

"Get outa here."

Moriarity said, "Let's go, Marty."

"Who is that bird?"

"Rumour Joe. Comes in most mornings. He is a bird. Voice like one too, huh? Crow, I think. Might as well get used to it—he's harmless—"

"Does he have any real info, though?"

"Don't think so. Who knows?"

"Sure would be nice if he did."

"Well, let's go."

"Can't today. Phillips—"

Moriarity nodded his head, and went out. Others followed him... Rumour Joe was still talking away...

Inside Phillips' hut there were many men and a good deal of activity and conversation.

He asked one of them, "Where do I find Phillips?"

"Who're you?"

"He sent a guy over saying he wanted to see me. Here I am."

The man looked him over.

"Come on."

He led him to a tiny room at the rear of the hut. It must have been a kitchen once, in the days when the villagers were still here. A man with powerful shoulders, closely cropped white hair, clean-shaven, sat on a rough chair behind a wooden table. He was studying what looked like a map or sketch.

He looked up, and sent the man away. He looked at Marty a long time.

... that face is really tough. One of the very few really tough ones I've ever seen. Solid. Whole man is solid. Old as the hills. God knows how old he is. But he can lick any of us . . .

He was ill at ease, standing there, watching Phillips roll a cigarette.

"Care for one?" he said, lighting up.

"Not right now, thanks."

A cloud of smoke from the wild tobacco came his way. It spun his head.

He coughed, "Jesus, blow that somewhere else, will you?"

Phillips laughed. "Hell, this stuff is good for what ails you!"

He took a few more big puffs, but this time was careful to exhale it away from Marty.

Presently, he asked, "How do you like it here?"

...an old Indian. A wise, tough old Indian...

He answered, at last, "Just what I've always wanted."

Phillips was grinning.

"Even better than down there?"

"Hundred per cent."

"You gave them a run for their money, I hear."

"More the other way around, I'd say."

"Well, you'll be alright now."

They sat quietly. Phillips was studying him.

...does he see Ching...

"Run across a guy named Slater down there?"

Marty gave a little laugh.

Phillips added, "Clean-cut, huh? Slater's Alley, buddy, where all the rats have mats."

He looked beyond Marty now, at the closed door...

"Good bunch up here. Couple rats here and there. We spot them, don't worry. We know the ones the Enemy doesn't even know. They send some of their favourites up here sometimes to keep their eyes on things. We give them back as little presents. All wrapped up. Just outside their hut up there. Sometimes we even leave a little love note."

He paused.

...is he grinning...

"I talk to every man sent up here. I can smell a rat the minute he crosses that door."

Marty said nothing, waiting.

Phillips leaned forward, talking quietly, earnestly.

"Now let me tell you the facts, buddy."

"You think I smell alright?" Marty said suddenly

Phillips laughed.

"That nose is never wrong."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. But look, there's one thing you ought to know—"

"What's that?"

"I'm no hero." So quietly.

The eyes upon him probed like two scalpels...

"Anybody say you were? You think I am?"

No reply. Only the gaze, there, trying to meet his.

Phillips went on, "Well I'm not. Know what we are? Idiots. POW Idiots. That's it. Trussed up, disgraced, dumb POWs. That's a hero? We'd be dead if we were, Landi. You know that. But here's something pretty good: The Enemy could find out tomorrow I have this place organized and get me out the way. No time flat. But they don't find out. Know why? Nobody talks. Before the rats even get the smell of it, I've already smelled them and they've had their little accident."

He paused, looking at his men . . .

"Nobody talks. And why don't bother us. We're defectives, Reactionaries. Who's a hero?"

He sat back, lighting another cigarette.

.. how the hell can he smoke those things. .

"But I was telling you the facts. O.K. You know what's going on down here. Those characters going hook, line, and sinker for everything the Enemy throws at them. Not even an inch of a fight. Hell, the Enemy doesn't even have to try. Most of them can't wait. Like a bunch of jerks on a street-corner, chasing the first tart that lifts her skirt. In short: things have gone to hell. So? Why? Look at it from the organizational point of view--all the good NCOs and officers have been packed away somewhere--most of the NCOs worth anything here--the officers, separate camp."

Marty shifted around.

"Sit down somewhere--on the floor--anywhere. O.K. Result: herd of juvenile delinquents loose down there having the time of their lives proving to the world that old Uncle Sam is a son-of-a-bitch. Selling him down the river. Some of them--not many--old enough to be your father. You know all this. You've seen it. Alright, that's the organizational side. That's

only part of it. The rest is what they themselves are. You see how many guys are up here? Hell, two hundred at the most. That leaves one thousand five hundred at least down there. How many more camps they got? Christ knows. Maybe they got the whole goddamn 8th Army. I don't know. I don't care—that's not our concern... *The dirty laundry right under our noses is our concern.*"

He paused, puffing his cigarette.

Marty was watching him, impressed and disturbed by his sense of mission, his intensity. He fought from being engulfed in it. He felt it would lead only to complete disaster. But its power reached for him.

The voice, steel now, came to him.

"That's a lot of men. You agree?"

Marty nodded.

"A lot of men, spitting on Uncle Sam," Phillips added.

Marty did not answer.

"So, what we gonna do about it?" Phillips paused. "I'll tell you what we *been* doing: getting down there, talking to them, roughing them up a little bit, generally trying to get them on the ball, letting them know we're still around—"

"Any results?"

"Sure. But what the hell, you can't have miracles!"

"And the Chinks—"

"The Enemy hasn't caught on yet. Maybe he will. Hell, he's bound to. So what? By that time we'll have planted something down there, inside those jerks. A core of resistance. Maybe spreading, outward, to a lot of them—think about that—"

"How long this been going on?"

"Four months."

Marty whistled.

"Organization, discipline pays off," Phillips said. He sat perfectly still now, staring hard at Marty, who felt the surge and pull of it, tugging at him, taking him... He fought it. He heard

Phillips' voice, earnest, quiet...

"Can I count on you?"

And his own, quickly, "For what?"

"When your turn comes—"

"For what?"

"To go down there—"

Silence.

Blue smoke hovering. He watched the blue smoke hovering... He wanted to get out of there. He wanted to stay, also. He wanted to talk to him, explain to him. But a voice said to him: *It's hopeless... closed mind, buddy...* The instant hanging before him, pulsating, carved out in time-space, beckoning him...

"Look, Phillips—"

Phillips was waiting.

"I just—listen—I *only want to get back alive*. See? Can you see that? Listen—you're heading for—you know what you're heading for—you know it—this is a bughouse—to go down there and try and straighten out those jokers—Jesus! I wish you luck, Phillips. But listen: I can't—I won't do it."

He was relieved. But also frightened.

...it isn't that easy...

Phillips never took his eyes off his man.

Phillips was thinking: there is some way to reach every man. Some way. Hold back the rage. He said, finally, "Think it over. Give it a good think. Think about all I've said."

The words hurt him. But he wanted to get away... Yet for a long while he sat there, saying nothing, feeling the eyes upon him.

"How much of this place you got organized?" Marty asked.

"Most of it."

"Sooner or later—Phillips—Jesus!"

"So what? Isn't that the risk of war? Didn't you go through that every day on the line?"

"Yeh, but there you've got half a chance!"

"Here too. You think it's any different here? You think you stop being a fighter when you're captured?" He paused. "Or was that maybe why you were captured?"

Marty was angry.

"What about you?"

"Does it look it?"

"Who sent you up here?"

"Nobody sent me up here."

Phillips went on, "My weapons are words and fists; my organization anybody who's got the guts to see his duty and to do it. My objective to knock some sense into as many of those characters down there as possible, to smash the Enemy's plan to capture their minds—"

"You're fighting two enemies here: the Chinks—and the one right inside those guys. What the hell kind of a fight is that?"

"A good fight."

They were silent. Marty looked into his face, then turned away.

"I can't see sticking my neck out for those guys. Don't you see—they *want* to do it—"

"O.K., we'll make them *un-want* to!"

Suddenly, words were flying furiously, from both of them, two opposing ends of a highly charged circuit.

"You haven't got a chance."

"The hell I haven't."

"There's something wrong with them. Inside, deep inside, rotten, the core's all rotten. You'll never touch it. Nobody will."

"I'll kick it out of them."

"The hell you will. They're something new. We don't know a thing about them."

"New my ass—"

"Bums. They'll make a goddamn monkey out of you—they'll be the ones who get the Chinks on you—"

"Necessary risk—"

"What for? Rotten bastards—good man like you—waste—what for? Listen: the front's a couple hundred miles down the road—"

"It's here! Right here!"

"Nothing to do but sweat it out and refuse to play ball with them and get back alive so some day you might be of some use again—that's all—"

"You're a damn coward!"

"The hell I am—but I'm not about to commit suicide—for those punks—that's all it amounts to—I'm not being pulled into it—"

Phillips was on his feet in one quick movement. So was Marty.

They faced one another, standing in their sea of violence, each waiting, eyes hard on one another ...

It receded, slowly—

Marty turned away, headed for the door ...

"So long, Phillips."

In the night Marty lay... I lie on this forlorn part of earth, that with the rest of it spins and hurtles nowhere, through nothing. The moment all life expires within me I cease to be. And that moment which I thought had been postponed now presses furiously upon me. For he is mad. And he will see to it that not one of us remains. The Chinese could not do it, but he will, this hero-madman will. Life leaving my body. Ever and ever. It seems I desire it. It seems to be buried deep inside me, dumb, dead, never ever living, fused with the living part of me, dragging at the heart of me, beckoning me to oblivion, nothingness. From whence I sprang. I see it: long cycle completed. Non-being: Being: Non-being. Endlessness ending. And in no way, no way, can I touch it. Dumb deadness, heavy blackness, at the heart of all things, dooming them even in their inception...

Dumb heavy deadness beckoning, deep, mute, and unknowing, uncaring, out of which all things living emerged, somehow, somewhere, other dawns'. . . somewhere, stillness . . . stirring . . . stillness . . . pounding . . . in the stillness . . . pounding stillness . . .

13

DAYS were passing and the cold reached for them. At night, now, the water froze. More and more fuel was fed to the stove. The fire within leaped. But the stove was small.

Morning. They were eating. Rice and soyabeans.

Kowatski muttered, "We gotta get onto the bastards about that clothing and heating they been promisin'."

"They promise you personally? You got it in writing?" Moriarity said.

"If we raise enough hell, maybe they'll fix us up."

"Jesus Christ, we ain't gonna make it—it's freezin' now, man." Jackson moaned.

"Get it in writing, buddy."

"We better go see them after chow," said Marty.

Franco was right on top of the stove.

"If I could live in there, if I could—"

"Move your ass, man," Moriarity muttered.

A man broke into the hut. It was Rumour Joe. He was very excited.

They continued eating.

"Hey—GUYS! Everybody *fall out after chow!*"

He started to leave after the announcement.

He lived near the Headquarters hut, and sometimes the CO used him to relay messages. This might have been one of those times. They took an interest.

Moriarity had him by an arm.

"What's cookin', buddy?"

"Leggo the arm! O.K. I think they're gonna pass out winter clothin', or tell us when it's gonna come, somethin' like that . . . Hey—the arm, buddy, the arm!"

Moriarity released him.

"Who told you, Joe?" Marty asked.

"Porky."

That was their name for the CO.

"How do you know what he told you? Was the other guy there?"

"Sure he was. Talks pretty good now!"

Peals of laughter.

"*Whatsamatter?* I ain't kiddin'! He must be takin' lessons."

"Sure, Joe, lessons—"

"Anyway, if you don't want to, you don't have to. I don't give a damn. I'm only supposed to tell you."

And Rumour Joe was gone ...

An hour later, about two hundred men were standing here and there on the small field, waiting for the Chinese to make an appearance.

There were many guards, more than they had ever seen in one place together. They moved to all parts of the mass, trying to line the men up in some semblance of a military formation. They were having bad luck, however, and even after a half-hour or so of great effort it was still only a crowd of men hanging around a field. The guards chattered and screamed and screeched. They pushed and pulled—to no avail. It remained a formless mass, utterly unresponsive.

It was not clear who saw them first. But the word went through the men quickly, and soon everybody was looking. A long column of perhaps fifty men was shuffling along the zig-zagging road. Marty watched, sick at heart. They were the worst he had seen so far. Filthy, ragged, hair and beards long and thick with dirt, lice

There was absolute silence as they stared and, stared at the column.

Marty moved closer to Kowatski.

"For Christ's sake ..."

Kowatski answered, quietly, "Wonder where in hell they're gonna put 'em?"

The column shambled and staggered along the road, grotesquely, unaware of where it was, where it had been, where it was going ... Dead men, momentarily resuscitated, shuffling along, heads down, seeing only the ground before them ...

When they began to pass the huts, the guards pulled a certain number out of the column for each one ...

Moriarity said, "We got two ..."

Suddenly there was a great deal of noise. They ignored it for a while, but then, as the column gradually disappeared into the huts, they turned to its source.

A group of Chinese stood on a platform before them.

Hopkins was laughing, "There's Porky!"

The little commander was as round as a barrel.

"He got that way eating rice?" Kowatski bellowed.

They all laughed. What he had said was repeated, passed along. Other remarks, too. On the platform, bedlam broke loose. Screeching and screaming came, first from the fat commander, then from the scrawny "interpreter," who was trying very hard to keep up with the commander's amazing delivery. The men enjoyed the spectacle like a vaudeville act, or a USO show. Roars and whoops of laughter surged up and down the "lines."

Though they knew that what was said might mean the difference between life and death ...

At the top of his voice, the interpreter was screeching in a Brooklyn accent of sorts. At times it was a tea kettle. Then a factory whistle. But he could not keep up with the commander, who stood by his side, stiffly, addressing not the men, but space, empty space before him, volleys of words flying from him at a fantastic rate.

At last, the men ceased laughing. They listened.

"*You guys!* ... Commander he say ... HE SAY .. Listen.

Bastards! Too many fuckin' guys they make the noise ... YOU GOTTA HAVE PERMISH, MAN, PERMISH ... He say ... No man here is Good Man ... ALL BAD ... VERY VERY BAD ... Lenient Policy not ap ... licabull ... *We not savages, cats!* ... Commander, he say ... *Bad things going on around Here!* ... Bad Men cause ... He know Bad Men, he say ... They try fuck up works ... *He know who are Bad Men* ... *Strict fuckin' warning, boys: Lay Off!* ... Wise guys first and last ... *Lay off Good Men— pro—gressives* ... Bad times otherwise ahead for *All Men!* ... We not savages ... **FUCKERS ...**

There was a good deal of fumbling around with a large package up on the platform.

Then the commander resumed and the interpreter dashed after him.

"We not savages! Soon winter come here, yeh ... We give clothing for All Men ... Here is Samples! ..."

Out of the package a blue, cotton-padded uniform appeared, then a cap, and then an overcoat. They were held up one by one for all to see.

Great cheering broke loose from the men below.

The interpreter made desperate bursts.

"LISTEN! LISTEN! Commander he say ... Yeh! Yeh! To all men issued ... you see? YOU GUYS SEE? ... Warm ... nice and warm ... see? YOU GUYS SEE?"

Suddenly, the clothing was thrown back into the package. They found out why when the interpreter finally caught up with the commander a little later.

"... but ... no issue ... until bad guys stop makin' trouble for progressives! See?"

The men were no longer cheering.

"... Bad Men must come see Commander ... Confess ..."

Now the rest of the translation, and the original as well, were drowned in a furious sea of hooting, booing, catcalling. The

commander screamed and screamed ...

The voice of the interpreter was heard only by a few up front.

"You Guys—*shut the hell up!*"

Somewhere a whistle was blowing. The guards swung into action, shoving and kicking the mass of hooting men. But they got little results. They started to use their rifle butts. The noise only grew louder. Now not a soul could hear one word of the engaging translation from the platform. Finally, the whole affair was called off, and the men, still shouting, booing, were herded off the field, and back to their huts.

They stood around the stove, words and thoughts collecting.

Jackson shuffled to and fro, kicking at the floor.

"That's a fine blast in the ass."

Marty was thinking: Something will come up, something will break our way, something must, bound to, sooner, later .. damn Phillips and his little game, damn ...

Hopkins was near him.

"What the hell we gonna do? Jesus, if only they'd come through with the heatin'—"

Some of them laughed, bitterly ...

Moriarity said, "You believed *that* crap too?"

Quietly, soberly, they talked among themselves a long time. Now and again ominous bursts of wind swept by. They stood around near the stove, their disappointment and bitterness immobilizing them.

The two men from the column lay in a corner, partially obscured by shadows, in two collapsed heaps.

They seemed to flow from the shadows, to be part of them.

Marty stood over them. One's eyes were open. He followed Marty's movements. Only the eyes followed. But they seemed to be on other things, not the man before them. Marty bent over him. The man's eyes upon his ...

"How you doing?" he murmured.

No answer came, but the lips pulled apart, and it might have been a smile....

They had done what they could for them.

Kowatski said, "We better try Phillips for new clothing for them."

"Good idea."

"Where you think they come from?" Jackson wondered.

"Looks like the Gooks had them," Marty said.

"I bet that's it."

"Nobody's gonna bet you," Kowatski said.

Night fell. They had managed to get fresh clothing from Phillips. He had no large stock, but occasionally on his trips to Slater's Alley, he picked some up. There were shoes for them as well.

The men waited, wanting to hear the story. They huddled around the stove; the two newcomers were now nearest it.

The one to whom Marty had spoken earlier seemed to be in a little better condition. They had fed him twice today.

"How goes it, buddy?" Marty said, softly.

The man seemed to shake his head. He was trying to answer. The voice came, faintly, "Thanks a lot you guys ..."

Kowatski murmured, "Really been through it, buddy."

The voice was barely audible: "Jesus, man, Jesus ..."

"Gooks?" Moriarity said.

The man's head nodded.

"We figured that, buddy."

"Right ... figured right ... crazy ... mean ... animals ..."

"What's your name, ol' buddy?" Kowatski asked.

"Kenton."

"Stan?"

The man murmured, "He's my mother-in-law—he—"

Moriarity offered his hand. "Glad to know ya—I'm Moriarity
— meet my buddies—this here's Marty—"

He introduced all of them.

Kenton said, "My buddy there—Joe Shadduck—"

Marty bent over him.

"Glad to know you, Joe."

They all tried to shake hands with the man from whom words would not come ...

Marty asked, "How long the Gooks have you, Sam?"

Kenton had finally told them his first name.

"About a year, I think."

A stirring and murmuring ran all through them.

Kenton asked, "You see how many come in today?"

"Yeh, Sam, 'bout fifty," said Moriarity.

"Used to be five hundred—at least—"

Silence all around.

"They never gave a damn. On the way down even—shootin' guys who fell out—musta been—hell, sixty seventy right there—musta—"

Shadduck's voice came to them for the first time now. It was barely a whisper. "Started out—hundred—least—"

Kenton resumed, "Like flies they died in that—that—Jesus—camp—dogs—like stray dogs—pigs—how'd we make it, Joe? I dunno—no clothing—food—ha—"

He tried to laugh, but the effort lay too far beyond him.

He went on, after a while, "I hear tell—Chinks pretty good to ya—not so—Jesus—lucky we—"

They were silent.

He drifted away into sleep, there, before them ...

Outside, the wind whistled. Its cold was feeling out the rugged peninsula ...

For a long while they sat there, talking occasionally among themselves, glancing now and again at the two who slept ...

Then they began to turn in for the night.

Marty sat up a while longer, near the fire, looking into the

faces of the two, and listening to the wind.

... She came to him, whispering, her warm breath upon him, "He's nothing, his head has been severed," and he was holding her, kissing her, deeply, her warmth, her womanness ...

Moriarity couldn't get to sleep. He was thinking of newspapers, magazines back home. Funny books. *Funny Books God*. There was one place in particular, near 50th Street. There he'd always pick up his funny books. And later when he was a big guy and finished with school (school finished with him, actually), working and all that (knocking off a piece once in a while), magazines, usually "*Sport*" and "*Thrilling Detective*" and "*Amazing Detective*" and "*Astounding Detective*" and sometimes "*Popular Detective*." That place would have been something to have. *Jesus*, a newspaper from every city of size anywhere, man. And inside them, and inside the magazines ("*Life*," "*Colliers*," "*Look*," all that) there would be stories about the war. Thrills reading about the Second World War. Headlines. THE ONE WE WON. GIs SMASH INTO GUADALCANAL. JAPS THROWN BACK. GIs STORM ASHORE. D-DAY. Millions like me read them, I betcha, man, and nobody had any idea what in hell it was all about. FDR. Nobody back there knows what anything's about anyway. *Not a fuckin' clue, man*. Big Game. *Big Thrill, man*. I remember December 7th. TREACHEROUS JAP ATTACK. We were in it. I was so fuckin' thrilled man I couldn't sleep for one lousy week. In my dull lousy life, at last, something was happenin'. It was like I'd been cheated because I missed the First One ... only read about it in those lousy high school books with that crumby ol' bag teacher. Because I—missed the ...

He felt himself falling, dozing, and sad ... now I know what it means. I know all the movies I ever saw didn't have a damn thing in them about war. That's the first thing I learned. We

wasn't makin' a movie, man, it was really happenin'. People killin' people. Heads blown off, guts torn out and fallin' in the mud ... And they were turnin' it all into a ball game. Sports-writers were runnin' the war, writin' it up, and the folks back home were the fans, cheerin' them on. Includin' me. And was I a fan! And now — *Here I am* ... Dirt, Filth. Fucked-upped ness all over the place. Lousy hate, misery ... Anybody feelin' like a big shot because a town's captured, torn up, people killed or driven off like animals, anybody feelin' like that is a goddamn nut or a punk kid. Filth, shit, piss, mud, blood, pus, boredom, cold guts, jumping asshole—scared, man, scared Hoping to die, get the hell out of it, kick it the hell outa your mind. What life's all about—*what a hell of a way to find out!* What a hell of a way in a hell of a place ... If only there was a one and only woman here. *Just one oh just one* ... He started thinking of all the women he knew. Had known. Seen. He began to slip, under the warmth, the warm darkness ... those fuckin dumb people back home, ignorant as dirt, not knowin' a fuckin' thing about us, this place, war ... not knowin' ... He was slipping, under ... into a pussy I'm goin', oh man ... Down the long descent, falling, falling into the deep, wet warmth of his phantasy, his own woman's pussy ...

... YOU STUPID BASTARDS ...

Phillips is there ... The words formed even before Marty's eyes opened. And now he saw him, leaning over the two. It was very early, dawn just breaking. The others stⁱll lay asleep. Why had he wakened? The very presence of the man had somehow made itself known to him. Marty watched and listened. „

“... go ahead—couple more—”

“... thanks—Sarge—lot—”

“Call me Phillips.”

"... Phillips ..."

Shadduck's voice came so faintly that the fragments were utterly meaningless.

— *What is he doing here? ... so damn early ...*

Marty called to him softly.

"Hey—Phillips—"

He turned.

"What's going on?" Marty asked.

"Just seeing how they are, my boy."

... *my boy ...*

"Seem a lot better. You men did a good job here."

"Uh huh. Thanks."

"Smoke?"

"That opium?"

"That's all there is."

Marty took one. He was lighting up.

Daylight was coming in fast now. He could see the face fairly well now.

"Have a good night?" he asked, slowly.

... *Is Phillips grinning? ...*

"Pretty good, buddy."

"How many they leave in your hut?"

"Four."

"Pretty bad?"

"Not too good."

"Gooks—"

"I know. Gooks."

"We been lucky—"

No answer.

Marty was up now, walking about, peering into the stove. He added wood.

"What you think about what Porky had to say?"

Phillips thought about that.

"Same old stuff," he answered.

Marty moved back to him.

"You think he meant it?"

Shoulders shrugging.

"I don't know. Who can tell? Can you tell?"

"That's so."

Marty turned away again, to the big drum holding the water. He drew some of it off. "If he does, though—"

When their eyes met and saw what was in the other's there was no need for words.

Phillips headed for the door.

"Let me know how they get along."

At the door, he turned. Seeming to know words were coming. Wanting to face them.

"If he means it—" Marty went on.

Phillips waited.

"If they mean it—Phillips—by Spring—Jesus—Phillips—"

"Well, when we find out ..." Halting, turning his gaze on the two lying there, then back to Marty, who was waiting, thinking to hear him finish. Then leaving ...

A FEW weeks later winter fell upon them. Suddenly, an icy wind swept down from the north, relentless and savage. It froze everything ...

Snow followed soon after.

The river froze.

Inside the huts, misery turned to hopelessness, and hopelessness to death. The numbers dwindled swiftly. The men huddled close to one another, using anything they could find to wrap themselves in. The little stove roared, but the heat it gave was sucked up quickly by the wind. Two or three feet from it, one could feel some heat. Some...

The men lay within that small area, piled on top of one another. Yet they were cold. But this way, at least, they would not freeze. They knew that. But the position was impossible. It could be maintained only for short periods, and then the top layer rotated with the bottom, and so on, all night long. Still, limbs stiffened, blood vessels blocked. And some of them would have to get up, walk around, bring the limbs back to life, slowly, painfully. The cold was everywhere, biting into them. Shivering, moaning, everywhere ... crucifying trips to the latrine ...

Kenton and Shadduck died first. Marty, Moriarity, and a few others struggled through the snow with the bodies. They took them to a nearby hill, designated by their captors as The Burial Place. They named it Gook Hill. In the cold wind, dragging the bodies of the two, they named it. Arriving there they found there was little to do but dig a shallow grave in the solidly frozen ground.

Other burial parties were there. Most of them were from the Progressives. Through with their task, Marty's group watched them. Some were stripping everything from the dead men they

had carried. They stuffed their pockets with the treasures and soon gave up trying to dig graves when they found the ground frozen. The bodies were just dumped.

Rage would have come, but the power of the cold smothered it.

... and now I have seen it all ...

Near the stove, the men huddled next to each other.

Jackson screamed, "*The rotten bastards!*"

Shaking with the cold, a chant was started, and soon was a chorus ...

"Make a rush—kill the bastards—clothes and stoves—or get killed tryin'—what the hell—we're done for anyways—whaddyasay—*hey—whaddyasay!*" Moriarity boomed.

It was taken up, and for a long while stirred them. But no move was made for the door.

Hopkins was yelling, "Marty—c'mere—*hey—c'mere--* You other guys too!"

He made room right next to the stove for those who had just returned from the Hill.

Franco screamed, "Let's turn the cunt in! C'mon! He's the cause of it all! *Turn Phillips in! Turn the cunt in!*"

This too was taken up ...

Kowatski roared, "Save your energy, you bastards! They won't let us all croak here! They'll do somethin' don't worry!"

Franco shot back, "Balls! What good's that when I'm awready croaked? I'm goin' right up there myself. *Yeh, to hell with it! He's got it comin', the bastard!*"

"Don't you try it, ol' buddy!" from Kowatski.

"I'm off man—you stop me!"

The whole mass of huddling men exploded. They scattered and fell, this way and that. A struggle raged. Kowatski tackled Franco at the doorway. The two rolled and fell all over the floor. Others dived in. Franco was pinned. The fight was all

gone. They were all exhausted. They breathed with difficulty, gasping, choking. After a while, they staggered back to re-form the tight huddle ...

Paulic was groaning, "About time now, about time ..."

The blasting wind was master of everything. It did what it pleased with the country. Mountains and hills shook before it. Rivers ceased to flow. Night and day, all nature lay still and was ravaged by it ...

Two more had died, tumbling out of the pile at night. The bodies were dragged outside. Tomorrow they would make the trip to the Hill.

Phillips burst into the hut. Someone was with him.

"What the hell's going on here?" he yelled.

Only moans answered him.

He walked around the pile of men.

"If you guys stay like that you'll all be dead by morning! Get up off your asses! Move! Your stove's in bad shape. Get some fuel. Use anything. Move! C'mon, Harry, let's get these guys moving!"

He and his aide pushed and kicked at the pile, pulling here, slapping there. It resisted, stubbornly, solidly. It fought back at them. But the two persisted. And after a time, it gave way. One by one, men rolled away. The room filled with movement. Fuel was brought in, the stove stoked.

Someone yelled, "What the hell we gonna do when we get tired?"

Phillips answered quickly, "Then make your pile, catch some sleep. But not too long! Always have a couple stand guard—one watching the stove—the other waking the pile—got that? You better! It's the only way. I want to see you all alive in the morning—understand me?"

Then, he was gone, taking Harry with him out into the wind

and off to another hut ...

The next morning, two more of them, Franco and Jackson, lay stiffly in the snow outside.

Marty said, "We better get them up there—c'mon—"

"Jesus—how in the hell—Jesus—"

"I don't know. I just don't know. I thought they were alright. I heard them roll out. I looked over—I just don't—"

"Hell of a—hell of a note—"

A few more treks to the Hill were made in the next three days. Many more were being made by the Progressives, who just dumped the bodies and scurried back to their huts ...

"Goin' like flies down there—"

Marty and his little group moved over to them, and did what they could.

The wind whipped and roared, night and day. White flakes, masses of them, tumbled out of the night sky, and were quickly made playthings of the ice-wind, which sent them whirling, swirling, everywhere, anywhere ...

Marty staggered into Phillips' hut. It was crowded with men. He fought his way through them.

"Phillips—listen!"

"What is it?"

"The Hill—we'll all be up there in a week—"

"Who today?"

"Johnson—Laramie—"

"You still doing like I said?"

"Yeh—"

"All of you come over here. There's still room. We'll pack this hut. We'll beat it. We've got to."

Marty was swaying.

"Those guys—Phillips—I wanted to tell you—any one of them—any time now—Phillips—you gotta face it—"

"What? What do you mean?" Then, suddenly understanding, banging his fist on the table and roaring, "Go ahead! Go ahead! Let them! Am I stopping them? Am I stopping *you*? NOW GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!"

Paulic lay screaming.

"Mother of God! I'm burnin' up! Burnin' up right to hell! What a lousy rotten deal! *I used to jerk sodas for Spizers!*"

The spasms grew less frequent. The voice weaker. They worked on him. But, soon, he lay still ...

"*C'mon!*" Moriarity was ready.

They swept out of the hut, those who were left. They headed straight for the Headquarters building.

Through the wind and deep snow they reached the hut somehow. There were no guards. The wind would have turned them to icicles. They pulled themselves to the door, pushed on it and fell into the room. The warmth, the odours, nearly stifled them. Chinese soldiers were sitting all over the floor. And eating.

Kowatski screamed, "*Where's the goddamn commander? Where's fuckin' Porky?*"

In fact, he was soon there, looking down at them.

Marty got up and, hanging onto him, spoke quickly, desperately, "Listen—clothes—winter clothes—fuel—food—you've murdered half of us already—half—YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?"

The interpreter was there. A flurry of activity and words. And then he turned to them, "You help us?"

They were upon him, suddenly, savagely, from somewhere the energy springing. They knocked him to the floor.

Soldiers rushed in, subduing them quickly.

The commander walked round and round them. He pointed to three or four, issued orders.

STAY here tonight, Harry. *I need you to stay here.* Phillips had told him that. And so he was staying.

He lay in the night, in the bitter cold. The fundamental insight into the essence. Striking out from the vantage point of nothingness. *Vantage point, Harry boy.* You have seen nothingness. You have known it so clearly as to be its blood brother. Don't worry, I will stay here. I, Harry, passionate philosopher of death and life—mark that well: death and life—Swear I will stay here.

The twinged voices of the many well-fed rose out of the booming silence of nothingness. The glazed gaze of the unremembered. Laurels. Professional laurels. Oh, la, la, laurels.

Schemata level. Yes. Oh, wife darling, well you knew me when first I won my professional laurels. Heavy life stirrings.

— Are you going to tell me, Harry, dear?

— To tell *you*?

— Yes, damnit, I!

— Oh.

— Well?

— Quite.

— You beast!

Had she ever had occasion to doubt that? Now what was she up to? Pretty wax doll.

— Oh, Harry, I don't want you angry.

Good. Oh, so good.

— Have you ever been a nudist?

— Must, oh, must you, Harry?

How old am I? My complexion won't tell. Weigh the makeup in pounds, kid.

— Is face cream expensive?

— Oh, God, Harry, good night!

When did you do that? Oh cruel one. Here we are in our little prison camp. Camp. How did it happen? Biggest joke yet on me. I came over here to die. It almost happened, I remember.

I was crawling in mud and I *knew* I was going to die. I knew that as well as I knew anything at all. And I wasn't a bit afraid. Exhilarated, awed, amazed. Oh, pep-prep school! Prep-pep ...

And I knew I was going to die. No question about it. I was going to know death ...

It was a hell of a position. Attack and counter-attack. The bodies piled up. No consolidation. Until, suddenly, they swung around to the east. I had seen that movement. In the mud and beautiful clear light of a new day, the freshness of it still with me, here, I saw the massed columns streaming and screaming toward our position. And I knew this was it, *I would hear the last screams and explosions and die ...* And I remembered ...

... when they screamed it was a simple matter for five husky young men to grasp them in just the appropriate places (well you know them, Harry, my buddy) so as to hold them steady so the white-coated humanitarians could propel into their veins just enough amytal to get them off to sleep and then the husky man-boys would change positions quickly so the white-coated humanitarians could attach the black band to just the appropriate spot (well you know it my laddie) on the forehead and flick the switch that sent the stream of electrons (by the way have you ever seen an electron) through the band through the skull into the brain cells (have you) titillating them and setting off the sudden violent twitching and reverent rigidity (oh clever boy, reverent), deep gasping breathing and stifled cry (whimper, Harry boy, whimper) and after a while the husky young man-boys carrying them back to their rooms, minor electrocution completed. And they would then lie limp, deathly limp, (yeeoohoo, deathly limp, Hareee) and finally come to and lie quietly until next time if there was one ...

White-coated humanitarians packing the precious little instrument and talking about the beauty and simplicity of it now strolling along the corridor (someday we're going to get a new hospital) back to their attractive green offices and storing it away (one mustn't play with it) and then having a cup of coffee ...

— Really nothing to it, you see, old Harry ...

— And it helps them relax and have a much better chance of us getting through to them ...

— Yes, getting through to them ...

— With what, boys, with what?

We were drinking coffee, I remember. Across from me the other laureates. Some older, but most near my age.

— Going to take in a show tonight?

— What the hell's playing?

— Don't know. Let's go anyway.

— Sure.

— Pizza afterwards?

— Sure ...

— Nice cold beer?

— Sure.

We were drinking coffee.

New patient. Forms first. Twenty-eight. Very tired. Grey matter caressed twice by electron streams.

— How old are you, Kenneth?

— You know goddamn well. It's on the chart, ain't it?

— Oh, yes, I just wanted to check.

— Check, schneck. What for check?

— I see. Thank you. And how are you today?

— Yeh.

Odd answer.

— How have things been going on the ward for you?

— Go fuck yourself.

Hmmm.

— Do you know where you are, Kenneth?

— Screw.

Aggressive reaction, chronic, severe, predisposition unknown, possible psychotic basis.

— Well, Kenneth, is there anything at all you'd like to tell me? Anything on your mind? Feel free to say what you wish.

— Go fuck yourself.

Free-floating hostility syndrome.

— Alright, then, Kenneth, perhaps we had better talk again some other time, eh? Meanwhile, if you feel you want to talk with me, just let us know, yes. Is there anything you need? Something we can do to make you more comfortable here?

— Yeh.

The chord. Oh, chord!

— Yeh. *Let me give you electro-shock, you cunt-lipped bastard you.*

Coffee ..

We were drinking coffee

— Said that, did he?

— And how.

— Poor fellow's in a bad way

— Can't deny the horror of it, though.

— What the hell, we get results.

— So did the Inquisitors.

Coffee. We were drinking coffee.

He was interviewing the new wardman. He was a nice boy. Fresh out of training. He would be very useful. Nice young man. Good background, very good background. One more question — just one more question:

— Well, Jim, what is your goal in life?

— I wish to be a housewife.

I threw it all up, wife, laurels, the works. **THEY'RE STILL LOOKING FOR ME ...**

You stay here.

I need you to stay here.

The sloppy soppy soft utterly empty comfort seekers, gutless wonders of the ages. Most subtle, most quietly subtle *bastards* of the ages. Countrymen. *Fellow countrymen!* Beloved fellow countrymen! Digression sub-number paragraph subsection two thousand seven hundred eighty-one, old zeropuss Harry. Time. There in the moment where there is no past or future and only the hard cold present your mind the mirror reflecting it and keeping out all else. Because I chose to come over here. This was the way to die. This the now. This. **NOW NOW NOW.** Like the terse, abrupt horror of a military order, damning in that instant all sense of continuity, the past and future neither contingent nor conceivable in any terms but the mirror image turning in on itself for itself by itself, disjunct, utterly apart from any aspect of awareness unconcerned with NOW. Atomization. Alright, fission. The only sure process matter could evolve for itself knowing beforehand that in the instant of its gambit there would be preserved instantaneously and forever the one and only reality capable of being perused in the instant of splintering atoms, electrons, and I knew that, then, crawling in the mud, waiting, knowing just as surely as I knew anything at all that at last the long sought elusive never known but once unknowingness would swoop down and lay its dread lovely hand upon me. The very one I had sought clues to in the years now behind me, long long trail of thought now fading, trekked over desert, vast, empty desert, barren, sought and never known, finding only at the conclusion of that particular phase (oh yes phase) that the answers were questions, that to gaze upon them would take me unerringly in only one direction: what you were, never was, what

you will be, never can be: electron streams (never seen) dispersing themselves into the nothingness of the cosmos, once red molten swirling moulded and cooled in the pounding stillness, and only the memory flickering about within mindstuff of scattered formed forms body mind soul atomized, fused diffusion and banality revamped, innominateness revealed. For I remember. The curse of the whole spinning never known even to itself race fully cascading upon those interconnected series of convolutions, preconsciously reversed. Back, driven relentlessly to its source, in the stillness, inconceivable, unbearable. Was it not? A blaze of light and the heavens opening and God Incarnated lifting you up in his eternal arms and enthroning you. Was that it? I, ol' Harrio, the first block in the building of those long steps to God-head? Blockhead? Because doom and damnation were in themselves essences and related to the illogically unfolding accidents only as it served the knowers of the accidents their immediate desperate need to relate themselves in some ways, always illusory, banal, but upon which one *could* gaze and live, unlike the Essence, which, to gaze upon meant death only death. Hate, Pride, Nation, Religion. Peace, War, Art, Music—the rest. WHY NOT? Who in hell was able to fashion the eyes capable of fastening on the Essence? Christ? Who was he? Saints? Are you a saint? Oh, Harrio. Damned, doomed, believing nothing, yet believing all of them, every damned one of them, knowing how without them there is nothing, absolutely nothing the stark silent irony of the dark aeons, pounding hollowly in stillness, falling back bit by bit from each and all of them, relinquishing them, and now to be fissionized, to send a stream of non-existent electrons singing zinging soundlessly across endless echoing nothingness, falling eternally, amidst the shadows of our unborn silence ...

... you stay here Harry ... I need you to stay here ...

And I shall, Phillips, oh I shall, for *your goal is exactly like mine*, I can't be eternally cheated ... I know it will happen ... will happen ...

... WAIT FOR THE BIG BANG, BUDDY ...

THE warmth came to Marty slowly, first melting the ice in his blood, then the warmed blood flowing through him to all parts of him. The floor was warm. Above him, someone was offering something. A bowl. Food. Hot rice, by God.

He pulled himself to a sitting position ... *No, I am not dreaming. The floor is warm. The man is real. The rice is real.* He took the bowl. The rice had a wonderful sauce on it ... *Are they chunks of meat?* He was dizzy with happiness. *Must be dreaming, that's all there is to it ...* He dared not taste it ... *I'm sure it will disappear. Bound to disappear ...* For a long time he stared at it. At last, he quickly devoured the food. *Marvellous ...* He licked the inside of the bowl. And his lips. The figure still before him took the empty bowl now and returned with it filled again. He was delirious with pleasure. Hot soya-beans! He dared not look to the right nor the left fearing he would suddenly wake up ... *Keep your eyes straight ahead. One false move destroys it ...*

The form there before him. Not so. Now if only he were to look up. Vanish, completely ...

Not so ... *look up ...*

"Do you feel any better now?" Ching asked.

"One hundred per cent," he said slowly.

"Good."

There was no doubt. And smiling, too

"I didn't think you worked up this way, ol' buddy."

Ching smiled.

"Well, not really. They just needed some help, that's all."

"Special problems?"

Now the slightest hesitation.

"You might say that ..."

"I just did."

And both smiled.

"Cigarette?"

Not even dreaming, not ...

"Thanks a lot."

Pause.

Then, "You've been missing a lot up here."

"Oh, I dunno."

"We've had our troubles, of course."

"I saw the 'burial' parties ..."

Ching waved it off.

"Most of those are from the bad huts, you know."

Marty said nothing, so Ching went on, "But the winter has been unusually severe. The men all seem susceptible to serious respiratory disorders."

"And freezing?" Marty shot at him deftly.

No answer. But was he ruffled?

"And freezing?" He repeated, louder, sitting up on one elbow. Ching lit the cigarette for him, saying nothing, looking steadily at him ...

The cigarette was glowing now, and delicious smoke soothed him. Moving his head to take a few looks around, he saw the three of them there, Moriarity, Kowatski, Hopkins, upon straw mats, asleep ... Chinese soldiers sprawled here and there, all over the room.

"Well?"

Ching, sighing, "You're still so unfriendly."

"I'm not a trollop."

"Who said you were?"

Silence.

"Why don't you answer?"

Silence.

The slightest shadow of unhappiness crossed Ching's face.

"We have a problem," he said confidentially, worried.

... *my old buddy* ...

"So do we, I can tell you."

Ching brightened, "Oh, I know all about it. But you have brought it onto yourselves. Oh yes you have! Just a little cooperation—is that too much to ask? Think about that. All of you could be warm, comfortable—see how it is in here—so much better than those cold huts—"

"Freezing huts—"

He remembered, in saying it ... *how many now, how many* ...

Ching went on, a purring little motor: "Have you thought about it? Think of it, all the huts heated in this way!"

... *If he would* ...

The man before him. Closer, an aura of extreme privacy. "This section causes more trouble each day. It disrupts the Programme considerably."

"How, Ching?"

Smiling.

"How, Ching?" he repeated.

Ching, drawing away, not taking it up. Eyes, now, on his man ...

"Sooner or later we shall find out."

"But we'll all be dead by then. You are not savages!"

Pause.

"I thought you would feel as I do. How unnecessary it all is—waste—all these lives—for perhaps ..." He paused, eyes fully upon him, holding him. "One man—"

Silence.

...*one man* ... *oh Ching I knew but was hoping* ...

"You're the one wasting them," Marty said.

Ching, sighing, was not happy, no, not too happy.

He answered, "You haven't changed. I shall just have to approach the others."

"Go right ahead." And then, "But wait a minute—"

Ching waited.

Marty puffed his cigarette.

"What makes you think the trouble-makers are up here?"

Ching stirred, slightly.

Marty pressed in, "When was the last trouble down there?"

Ching weighed this. "Two nights ago."

"That proves it! There wasn't a single man out of this place then—ask the guards—ask the weather. Who in hell could get through that? You tell me. Go on, tell me."

Ching smiling.

"So what's the point of knocking us all off? You are not savages!"

Ching silent. And still smiling.

"So you might as well send me out of here and back to my hut, where I belong. You know what we came for. You're not going to give it."

Ching watched him a while, and then moved away from him, over to the other men. Ching fading. Marty felt the warmth upon him. He puffed on his cigarette a last time. The warmth caressing him. Lulling him ...

...It was Fall. He was helping his father gather the remains of the summer's garden, pieces of wood, dead things, fallen leaves. Rake them into a pile, set fire to it, watch the fire glowing, rising, the smoke-aroma wonderful in the still, copper-red evening. This very evening and his father, there, in the orange-red light of the dying sun, in the garden, within him, sustaining him now ... Leaves and scraps of wood burning in the sunset of this autumn day. Clean for the coat of Winter, ready for the Spring, when the cycle would begin again. Beloved time of Spring, when hope would suddenly be reborn within him, the stark, long despair of Winter over . . His father in the Autumn sunset. ...

Ching talked to the others a long time. Then he went to another part of the hut. When he returned he was carrying a

bowl of hot food. Marty could smell it ... *Bring it here, Ching, oh!*

Ching sat down across the way, and looked over at him. He seemed unhappy. But now, he was smiling.

"Would you like some?"

Marty was licking his lips. Smiling for joy.

... *if I had a tail I would wag it ...*

Ching was beaming as he went off. The steaming bowl was in his hands when he returned. Rice. Meat and sauce.

So good.

Marty ate eagerly, smiling now and then at his Ching.

"You and I—" between mouthfuls—"could be the greatest buddies—why in hell—did we have to—meet here—why—"

Ching's look was tender. "Regrettable."

He sighed; then, brightly, "Perhaps you can stay with us, when it is all over. Would you like that?"

"When will that be, Ching?" So casual.

"Oh, all things end."

"Yes?"

"Of course."

Pause.

"You old Ching-fox."

"Well, I don't know! How should I? You know as much as I. Some day, of course—"

Shutting like a clam.

Though he got the feeling that something was in the air ... Within, a flicker of hope tingled.

The meal was so delicious. With great pleasure he noted the other men had been given some too.

... *good old Ching ...*

"When you going home, Ching? Doern't look like this damn war's ever going to end. You'll be here the rest of your life. Don't they send you to a place for a certain amount of time?"

"We were not sent here. We are all volunteers."

Marty stared. He was looking for the laughter in Ching's eyes. But there wasn't a hint.

He found it in his own.

"Why do you laugh?"

... oh, Ching, bring me more, oh: more to eat ...

Ching's chopsticks worked so fast.

"Just thinking of an old joke."

"Oh no you weren't. You thought that was funny."

"Ching, how could I?"

Chopsticks flying ... "Sometimes we stay until a job is done."

"Ol' buddy: some job."

"You just don't understand—appreciate—"

"Delicious. Isn't it?"

"Excellent. They have a fine little cook up here. She is Chinese, by the way."

"She?"

Ching laughed.

"Certainly, she. We have no problems with our men. They have a purpose, and know it. Highly disciplined. What you're thinking could only happen in a corrupt Western army, particularly yours."

Marty thought about that.

"You're so right, Chingy."

... I'd sure like to see her ...

"Doesn't she get lonely?"

"Why should she? There are many comrades here. She has much to do. Her work, her studies ..."

... oh Jesus, sweet Jesus, Ching ...

"Of course, sometimes she longs for female friends, but we are taking care of that. We are sending for helpers soon."

... helpers soon ...

The meal was over. He smacked his lips.

"My God, that was better than good!"

"I'll be sure to tell her."

"Yes, yes, do that."

... for a big cup of coffee ... great big cup ...

They sat for a while in silence. Ching offered another cigarette.

... here we go again ...

They smoked. Watched one another. Circling blue haze.

... those guys, Ching ...

"What's the climate like where you come from?" Ching asked.

Marty laughed. "Not like this, brother."

"Nor where I live, either."

"This is hell frozen over."

"Your turns of phrase—"

... my turns ... oh, Ching-ding

"Ching."

... those guys ...

Tenderly, "Yes?"

Blue smoke swirling ...

"Let's get down to brass tacks."

Ching liked that. He was smiling, but surprised.

"What do you mean?"

"Come off it?"

"Really, what—"

... bastard ...

"Those men—stop acting—Bastard! They're freezing, dying—are any left, Ching? I helped bury six yesterday. How many are left? Mr. Civilized—you want that?"

Leaning in to him.

Ching, so hesitant, puffed his cigarette languidly.

"What do you expect me to do? What are you willing to do?"

"Shove it. The damn trouble's right down there under your nose. Think we care? What the hell do we care! Why can't you realize that?"

Ching let the smoke out, slowly. "Can I believe you?"

"Certainly!"

Ching smiled.

"Would I kid you, Ching?"

The answer came quietly. "Yes. You would."

Marty slammed his hand to the mat.

"That does it! Goodbye!"

But Ching's hand was on his arm, holding him, urging him back ...

"Nuts! Let go! No more bull now!"

"Listen—listen to me—"

A few of the soldiers were making their way towards them. Ching shouted something. They went back.

Kowatski shouted across the room. "Tell him to go to hell. Mart—"

Moriarity and Hopkins, nearby, laughed. With warmth and food, laughter had returned.

But Ching seemed aware of nothing save holding Marty's arm, not letting go once, until he was again seated.

"What are you trying to do? Stay right here. Did I say anything about *not* taking an interest in them? Did I?"

Marty said sharply, "I know—of course—you're not a savage—civilized—highly ... Highly!"

"Don't be so stupid!"

"Don't be so bastardly!"

"I *am* interested."

"Then do something."

"I'm trying to—"

"Not this way—"

"What other?"

"Let me out of here—"

"Stop! They will only shoot you!"

Marty checked himself. He turned and looked at Ching, who was so concerned for him. He sat down.

At last, he mumbled, "You better do something fast."

Ching was puffing a new cigarette, "When it's time."

The wind was blowing fiercely. It blasted down on the camp. From the hills it rushed down, shaking the buildings. If a man walked into that wind, his breath was taken away, and he was strangled, and might die on the spot.

"What's your wife doing?"

Still there. Still. You whoremaster you. Not a dream. Not another world. Here. Just here. Perhaps, though, within. No. Only from him. Before, after—and now beside him. He stared with amazement.

"My *what*, Ching?"

Quaintly, neighbourly, "Your wife."

If he got up and screamed, one long careening scream, echoing forever and ever, and ran around the room and kicked everything and everybody he would feel a lot better. He wanted so much to do this. His muscles were quivering. His heart racing. But the hand within laid itself on him, restraining him ...

... pure whory whoremaster ... answer you I shall answer ...

"You know I don't have one," he said quietly.

... Time is not so certain. In the fusion all is one. When time whispered to me last, I thought it was a woman, devoted to sustaining me in her arms, forever and ever. Within me, her voice had told me, and tells me: I shall endure with you, my dear love, my womanness receiving you, enfolding you, caressing you, my dearest love ..

"You aren't listening! You haven't heard a word I've said!"

So it was.

"You've been dreaming! Day dreaming. What about?"

... so you think I'll tell you ... whoreman ...

"Her?"

He didn't even feel laughter, a numbness upon him .

... All must die. I hear my heart beating and I wonder if in the next moment it will cease doing so. I worry about this. For you are my heart. I shall struggle to keep you alive within me.

ever and ever, fighting for breath. Every muscle and nerve fighting monster death, black monster death of my life love ... kissing her, murmuring to her, caressing her ... Quickly roll the years. Age upon you clamps its grip, two icy hands of ghostly white. Loneliness in the night. I see the shore. I shall make my way back. Age at the window. Fading photographs ... Machine guns chattering. Grenades. Bullets whining ... So much quicker, my love, bring they the end ...

It was the knob of the hill they were after. That was where the enemy fire was coming from, fire which sprayed the knolls below, knolls the company had taken only after a very hard climb up the slope. Thirteen air strikes. And he didn't know how many artillery assaults upon it. All vegetation had been burned. The earth was ploughed like a farm field. Yet, the fire continued. So they went after the knob. The radio was out, so artillery could not be requested. No mortars either. The runner had just come back and reported their crews all dead. From the knob lead hell rained down on the entire company ... The men had lost the momentum of their advance. They were lagging, and some had stopped. The Captain urged them on, shouting, "You've got to! Don't you see what they're doing?" Another fifty yards and they were within grenade range. Those who could sent a shower right into the knob. The fire diminished. The Captain stood up, in plain view. "C'MON!" he yelled, sprinting for the knob. At the brink of it he was hit. He staggered and fell backwards, tumbled over and over, for about twenty-five feet. The men did not break, but carried their rush to the knob, engaging its remnants, destroying them ... I watched the Captain tumbling, and made my way to him. He was struggling to get to his feet; blood gushed from the entire right side of his body. When I reached him, he was almost on his feet, and shouting, "Get back up there! GET GOING! TAKE THOSE MEN WITH YOU!" Then he swayed and fell

to the ground ...

"Why don't you listen?"

... why don't I ... still there! ...

"What, Ching?"

"I've just been wondering—why don't you—"

Pause.

"What, Ching?"

"Tell me—"

"What, Ching?"

"—his name now—"

"Whose, Ching?"

"You know, now."

"I don't, Ching."

"It would save so much trouble—"

"You are not savages—"

"You can appreciate the situation—"

"Civilized—highly—"

A sigh, so deep. It would swallow them all.

"You are so stubborn. It wouldn't surprise me if it were you."

"Who told you? Who's the squealer?"

Ching even grinned. He was quiet, looking around the hut now.

Marty said, "Sure. It's all of us. That's all we live for. We're heroes. Wreck your programme. See, we get up out of our nice warm huts around two a.m. each morning, turn ourselves into ghosts, glide by the guards, go down to Slater's Alley and play Great Big Heroes. We make men out of the boys. That's all we live for. We were sent here. Want that in writing? Where do I sign, Ching?"

"I see."

"If you think I'm kidding you—"

"You sleep here tonight," Ching snapped.

Official Pronouncement.

Then he went away, to the other side of the building. Some time later, he left.

is that where the cook sleeps ...

Moriarity said, "Hey, Marty, he got pissed off at you."

"Yeh."

"You sure talk a lot with that jerk."

"He likes to shoot the bull."

Moriarity shifted around. He pulled a thicker straw mat under him.

"Know what he wants?"

"Phillips."

"Yeh. Through us, huh?"

"Through us."

"Doesn't know, huh?"

"That's what he claims."

"Think he does?"

"I couldn't tell you. That guy--"

.. "Yehhhh ..."

They were quiet. Hopkins was whistling. Kowatski was looking over at them.

Moriarity said, "What's he gonna do?"

"About what?"

"Those guys."

"Damned if I know."

"What's he say?"

"That he's 'interested'..."

"He's crazy. No foolin'. That one's really crazy."

"They all are."

"But that one speciall'—"

"If he'll really do something, he can be crazy as hell, for all I care—"

"Hell, yes, I go along with ya --But, Jesus--what a—"

Kowatski came over. He whispered, "Did the little shit leave any smokos? I'm half-dyin' for one!"

"Well, here's half a one."

"Thanks a lot."

He lit up, a blissful expression on his face. For a moment. Then, "What about those guys?"

"Like I was telling Mory—I don't know—"

"What the hell we gonna do?"

They were silent.

Hopkins shuffled over.

"Fellas, this is the greatest. Let's put in for transfer here "

There was no answer. Hopkins sat down by them.

Then Moriarity said quietly, "Where did our best buddy go?"

"I wonder," said Marty ...

CHING was chuckling to himself, clucking even. And thinking, thinking swiftly, in the night wind.

He came to the first hut. He said to one of the soldiers accompanying him, "Put your lights on."

Beams filled the hut. A pile of men were next to the stove. Not many were asleep. A great shudder seemed to be going through the pile. The tiny stove flickered dimly.

"Gentlemen!" Ching called.

The lights flashed over the pile. Forms of men began to appear. The sudden intrusion of the light hurt them, adding to their misery. Moans and cries, in the night ...

"Turn that fuckin' thing off, for Christ's sake!"

Other voices joined in. The room was alive with movement now and voices.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" Ching was calling the meeting to order ...

"You crazy mother-fucker! Turn them goddamn lights off! Get the hell outa here! Come back with some stoves! Clothing! You fucker!"

"Listen to me—I have something—" Ching was entreating in his cultured tones.

"Go to hell!"

"Turn those lights off!"

"Bring some heat, you yellow bastard!"

"You filthy pig-faced cocksuckin' bastard—"

Seething uproar. In the icy hut, they were shouting, now throwing things, whistling, screaming. In the glare of the lights, their breaths hovered like little clouds all above them.

Ching motioned for the lights to be put out.

The noise ceased after that. Only the groans of those most

ill reached his ears.

And the chattering of teeth. Nearby.

Calmly, pleasantly: "Are you comfortable?"

A scream.

"Get the hell out!"

Renewed uproar, sudden, and soon over.

"I was only asking because I do know some of your friends are nice and warm now—and fed. You know, these huts could hold heat very well. Do you have any idea how warm it is up there where your buddies are now, up there with the Commander? He is very hospitable."

Out of the darkness: "Why don't you fix us up, then?"

Ching purred on, dialogue in darkness: "Your buddies have even taken off their jackets. Do all of you have jackets? And the lovely meals! And smoking. Really, they are quite comfortable."

"No good bastard! Get the hell out!"

... Words in darkness ... ice cold darkness ...

"What have you done with them, bastard? They had a mission there—"

"Oh, yes, I know about that. They came to request heat for everybody, and now they've got heat for themselves!"

"What about it, bastard, *what about it?*"

"Get the hell out!"

"Heat—put some heat in—*move, bastard!*"

And then, silence, but for a sound, heard by all, bizarre, as of a tongue clucking against a palate ... The gentle sound of Ching's reproach ...

"Well, you are just about the dumbest GIs I've ever known"

And again, the clucking sound, there in the night, for them.

The enthralled silence, the complete silence, now broken by a stiletto voice flying straight and true for the clucking man before them,

"Go fuck yourself man! Go take a good fuck for yourself!"

Lousy sonuvabitch you!"

Stirring them all. And now screams, shouts, objects flying, banging of feet on the floor, pandemonium. Ching, listening, waiting, trying to get his voice heard, and failing, utterly, unable to deliver even the first syllable, the noise rising instantly to smother it. At last, shaking his head sadly, and still clucking, the sound heard this time by no one, he turned for the door ...

IN any case, Ching had come too late. Phillips and his force of five had some time before slipped away and started the murderous trek through the ice night to their objective. Deep lay the snow. The wind whipped into it and piled up enormous drifts. The ice-wind cut and bit into them. Wind and snow seeking the core of them. Seeking to seize it, hold it, forever, and ever ...

... at least the guards will be indoors ...

Feet pulling and pushing at the snow. Another step forward. Wind roaring now, stinging, hurting him ... *Tonight if ever there was a night is the night. Oh yes, my beauties. Oh yes, bastard white night. What I have worked for, waited for, a long time. Tonight if ever is the night. The One. Oh yes. You bet your life and oh by God ...*

Words flashing through his mind, darting round and past the pain ... *I have seen the rotten little bastards piling up their corpses on the hill oh God. You listening to me God? I have seen them fall over on their faces in their rush to help the Enemy. I, God, now listen, God, I have done all I could as one human being to deal with it—even this—who would do this, God? Never seen, never heard of, never hoped to see or hear of. Yet here it is, was, will be. But tonight I hold the cards. Straight flush aces down oh God. I'm playing them. And bastard white night, ice night, you're my partner. Oh, yes, oh, yes, fine partner. Put her there, oh Partner. You don't know it. Who would know it? Do you know it? Put her there, you bastard. BASTARD. Listen, listen now, God: I have spent all my life soldiering. Hear that, night? I have seen it all with these old eyes. I have seen what is called valour and honour and courage and glory such as just a few of us have, my God. And I have seen the rest: skunks,*

pills, fine swine, God. Fine swine. Half-assed officers and NCOs. All that and more too. But this, God, listen now: never have I seen this or ever hoped to see this or ever thought to see this. For the hordes of dillies they pass off as soldiers, wearing that great Uniform, would not, repeat, would not be fit to shine the shoes of those I have known, seen, or heard of. Fine swine, ice night, white night: you hear that? Snowed. Got me snowed. Jesus, snowed! Laugh, you bastard, tickle me and laugh. Months waiting. Planning. Now—here. And I can't fail. For I have planned well. Down to the last simple second of the last living moment ever moment seeking night. That and only that. You care then, white night? Hell I care. And once we get inside and get to where I know he will be, should be, brother oh brother, you're a gonner. Yes, I'll get him. How I'll get him. Because I'm all afire, God, inside with what I know I must do, will do. While my buddy and compatriot in arms oh arms pure Landi buddy boy up there with his three bosom palsies warming his tootsies with the Enemy. Why didn't I get him? Oh sweet Landi there'll be time yet, time, time yet. Warm your footsies beauty, fill your gut with all their goodies, you're a growing boy my laddie, and I'm your ever Papa. No-Hero buddy boy and beauty Landi. His sweet little ass. Saving and warming his sweet little ass. How's Porky's food, my buddy, best and best my buddy. I'm no hero, Phillips ... HO sweet Jesus, he just had to, had to tell me... Old man. What the hell I'm doing here? What the hell, you white-haired bastard, what the hell now. What did you say in '42 then? And before that? Did you say that? Or was it, "I'm just a kid, my mamma." You did say that. How you said that. Who the hell's your father, General Gorgeous Gorgeous Washington? Cut that crap out. Do I remember? Look it up sometime. Number One ahead now. I want to be the first there in that firing squad to pull the trigger buddy. Sweetie-ple darlings. Tonight's the night, my Slater. You're the one, my Slater. You make Landi and his crowd look like a bunch of Heroes,

Slater. I'm coming for you, Slater. Just around the corner, Slater. Tonight's the night, full payment, cold cash on the line, my Slater. I don't know where you've come from but I do know where you're going The Hill, my beauty. Push up daisies there my beauty. Fertilize the soil, my beauty. We'll watch your buddies drag you there, my Slater, bucko wucko, Slater, bastard Slater ... and then we'll drag them, Slater...

Looking back now, he saw they were there, following, fighting the ice night, hurt and blinded by the whip wind, cursing it, striking out at it, crying out in it...

Some time later, they reached the entrance. And, as he had hoped, had known, there were no guards in sight...

They passed the first hut. Lights burning within... *there they are... Guard Room... if you could call it that... want to call it that? Go ahead, just call it that... there they are, inside... they're nice and warm, inside... No one would be likely to be wandering about on a night like this, now would they, would they?...* He was chuckling. On past it. Into the wind and deepening snow, and the heart of the section, past a hut he knew would be the one he had spent the first few days in... *Good God, can you tell me: when was it?*

Huts all around. Buried in the blizzard, and the night. But outlined starkly against the white snow, jumping out of the night at them.

"What the hell's that?"

He had stopped. Even in the cold hell he had stopped. The wind hurting even more. A man next to his ear now, telling him: he too had seen. He stopped them all. He looked again, intently. There was no mistaking it. Three or four figures in the snow, outside a hut, just to the left of them. Lying in the white snow of the night. But moving. He was almost certain: moving. Swept by the blizzard. But moving. He struggled over towards them. The others followed.

He was wrong, though, about the figures: only one was moving

He bent over him. He could not make out the face, but he knew what would be in it, gazing as it was upon the final darkness before it...

How did they get here? How in the hell... Stopping, abruptly, wondering no further, at once knowing, suddenly, and sick with horror and shame at the knowledge. He put his voice next to the man's ear and asked him. He wanted to hear it, to know from him, and so make no error...

"How did you get here?"

No answer. Only what seemed like a little cry, after which all movement ceased, and he was still, like the others there, lying near him.

But I know, he thought, I know...

Jenkins was beside him.

"What did he say?"

"Not a thing."

"The bastards threw them out. Chief."

Neither Phillips nor any of the others, now gathered about them, answered that. In the wind's fury, in the night, they stood a few moments longer, looking down at the figures lying there, in the whiteness.

Now Phillips moved off through the snow, and ice-wind, away from them. His men followed.

...If I had time, I would stop. They want me to stop. Try my damndest to find out who they were, and let their people know, somehow, someday. And tell them what? Yes. Just yes. That. But I can't stop. Just ahead there: Objective. You can see it. Phillips, you can see it! The time slips by so quickly. Got to beat dawn. First and foremost: Mission. Stop quivering, you nitwit. Yes. Even if tomorrow morning they will see the ugly frozen corpse of old man Phillips in the snow. Here we go...

He stopped. So did the others. Just ahead was a hut. He waved his hand, and they moved at once, some to the window,

some to the other side of the building, covering all approaches and entrances. One man remained with him, and this was Jenkins.

"Now." He was muttering more than speaking, trying to keep at bay the excitement he felt as the plan—months in making, fitted together only after many dangerous missions—was about to come to fruition, by his own hand. "Second on the left, remember, soon as we get in, remember that. He may have moved. If so, it will be rougher. Remember how I'll know. I'll have to feel his face. If that wakes him up, even if it isn't him, he's done for. If he doesn't wake up, and he's the one, I tap you. Get that straight once more now. If I don't tap you, we move on, hunting for him. We'll find him. It'll be rough. Keep in mind the objective. Keep that fast and hard in your mind. We didn't come all this way just to get a simple Chink."

Jenkins, held by eyes he could not see, but certainly felt, there, upon him, answered quietly, "No, we didn't—sure as hell didn't—"

They crept up to the door, and worked it open. Inside, the warmth came to them and soothed them, even in the anxious moments now upon them. Phillips led, and slowly they made their way to the left, along the narrow corridor. He heard Jenkins' breathing. And someone snoring. And the breathing of those sleeping. His own heart, thumping. Slowly, carefully, they crept along. At last, they stopped and entered a cubicle. Phillips stumbled across someone. Both men froze in their tracks, ceasing even to breathe. But the figure did not stir. Phillips bent low. He placed his hands on the warm floor. They unstiffened after a while. But he waited even longer, to make sure. Then he put them to the sleeping man's face, slowly, carefully. The man did not stir. The fingers moved across his face. The man lay still. Phillips withdrew his hand, and, turning slightly, tapped Jenkins on the shoulder ...

"Dear old friend Ching, I'm not kidding you."

A voice. "Why do you treat me this way?"

... is the dream never ...

"I treat you alright, Ching, and you know it."

A movement out of nothing.

"I know no such thing. Look at you—falling asleep right in the middle of my telling you something."

"I'm sorry, Ching—but, Jesus—so boring—you're so—"

"I am your only friend here, and you turn your back on me."

Silence.

"I think you'd really like to tell me—"

Silence.

"So badly—your best friend—you treat me so badly—"
*... only to use me. I feel the loss of it. To join her. ... What were
sweet potatoes? Who lived next door? ... crumbling shadows ...
back upon ... dawns.*

"What was that?"

"Did I say something?"

"I heard your voice—"

"I think you heard wrong—"

Silence Then, so tenderly, "What's on your mind now?"

PHILLIPS was not quite through when he and Jenkins emerged from the warm hut into the appalling cold.

Rounding up the others, they retraced their steps through the section.

When they came to the hut where the bodies of the four lay, he suddenly halted. Within himself, a decision had been taken. But his men were in no mood to linger. They urged him on.

Jenkins whispered hoarsely, "What's the idea, Chief?"

Phillips just stood there, staring at the bodies. At last, he spoke: "C'mon."

He was moving towards the hut.

He was moving, and they stood there, looking after him, one of them now saying, "Hey! What the hell you ..."

Phillips already some ten yards away ... Not stopping, turning, or answering.

Knowing: soon, they would follow ..

He had reached the door. A few sharp kicks and it flew open. It was fairly warm inside. A good stove burned in the middle of the room. The flames were shooting from it, through places where the cover fitted badly, and shadows danced all about. Flickering, yellow, just enough to show him the forms of some of them, there, asleep, on the floor, close to one another, but not piled; no need for piling ... In a ring around the stove they lay, though not too close, for there the heat was intense. He walked over to them and prodded the first man he came upon. His foot prodded and prodded, until the man was awake. He heard his men entering the hut. The last one in was closing the door ...

"Get the rest of them awake," he muttered.

The man at his feet sat up, rubbed his eyes, blinked, yawned, and stared at the figure above him.

"What's goin' on? Who the hell are you? What's the idea?" he mumbled.

"Just stay awake," the answer came.

After a while, after much kicking and prodding, groaning and cursing, the men were all awake.

Whining voices now in solo and chorus.

"Who the hell are you, big shot?"

"The war over?"

"What the fuck's goin' on?"

... mamma's little darlings whining ...

"Shut your goddamn mouths, beauties."

Brief silence and immediate. Then, faint mutterings and mumblings.

Then, "My name's Phillips."

Instantly, a thin, high voice shot out, "It's that fuckin' trouble-maker from up there."

A chorus of voices.

"Come down to work us over, Hero?"

"What the hell you want, anyway?"

"Come off it. *Vamoos!*"

"Blow!"

"Mind your own goddamn business, Buster!"

And again, his own voice silencing them: "Shut your goddamn mouths!"

He waited. Absolute silence. And now, shifting, turning evading the figure before them ...

"Now, then," he began, his eyes going over them, "answer this: do those bodies outside belong to you?"

Silence. The crackling and snapping of the stove's fire .

A cough.

"You deaf? You sweethearts deaf? You red-blooded American boys deaf?"

The voice steel, in the night, finding them ...

"You rotten Reform School bastards deaf?"

The voice, hitting them ...

Lunging quickly now, forward, swooping up the one nearest him, pulling him to his feet, dragging, pushing him to the wall of the hut, slamming him against the wall, while they watched, hardly breathing, waiting, making no move, none at all ...

"What's your name?" Phillips demanded of him.

He held the man against the wall in a vice grip, relaxing it only when the answer did not come immediately, so he could give him a good shaking.

"C'mon, c'mon, what the hell's your name?"

The fellow groaned weakly, "Roberts."

"O.K., then, now tell me, those bodies out there belong to you? Or any of you? You know them? They belong in here?"

The man chattered, "What guys, what bodies—what the hell you talkin' about, man!"

The man was sobbing, and choking in his sobbing.

Phillips slapped him across the face, hard, once, twice ...

"Don't fool around with me, chickie! You answer! Who the hell are those guys out there?"

Voices rose now from behind him, angry, almost, had they not been so whining, frightened ..

"Lay offa him, man."

"Who the hell you think you are?"

"C'mon, get outa here, lay off—"

Soon ceasing, as Jenkins and the others moved among them. Silence prevailing, except for the whimpering of the man in Phillips' grip, and Phillips' angry breathing, as he waited ...

"You want me to send the boys out for one? Stand him right up here, in front of you? You want that?"

The man screamed, "Help me! You fuckin' guys help me! For Christ's sake!"

No one made a move.

Phillips shook him, and again slammed him against the wall

"C'mon, I'm wasting no more time!"

The man whined, and choked in his sobs ...

"Yeh—we know them—they belong in here—they sleep here—"

A voice behind him, sullen, dragging, "If it'll make ya feel any better—and get the hell outa here—I'll tell ya—but let the poor jerk loose, will ya?"

Phillips, in fact, did release the man, or rather, flung him aside, so that he sprawled on the floor, whimpering ...

He headed towards the voice.

"O.K. Let's hear it."

Shifting movements in the room, feet moving, scraping the floor, coughs, mutterings ...

Moving to the voice, listening to it. "See, they were just about done for and were makin' a hell of a racket in here, nobody could sleep, we'd just wind up gettin' whatever the hell they had—if we ain't awready—"

Now another voice, screaming, "He's nuts Phillips—they were awready croaked when—"

Silence.

Only Phillips, the sound of him moving ...

The sullen voice again, almost a laugh, "Well—what the hell could we—do—huh?"

Phillips, moving, homing on it, truly, the voice ...

"What could you—buddy—What could you do, buddy—"
Steel-tones mocking it, finding it ...

Moving to it ...

Movement all around. Deadly fixation on the target. His men closing off the area; Phillips right on the voice now, and a scream tearing the night. Violent struggling. Phillips' iron grip unbroken, and soon, the man's last gasps rattling from him, reaching all of them; and then, silence, only a head thumping the floor. Phillips, at last, relaxing his grip on the man's throat ...

It exhilarated him. Jolts of electricity seemed to shoot through him ... Two throats tonight, so far, had he held between his

hands. *Avenger's Hands* ... As they squeezed, he felt the crunching of bones and cartilage, the desperate fight for air, the violent twitching and shuddering of the whole body, the final gasps, and then, silence: mission accomplished ...

... because I believe in Honour, buddies, and you crumby bastards are not in any way shape or form going to smirch it, this honour, this honour of my country. If I could get my hands around the throat of every little rat down here, oh, buddies, tonight would be the night! Kids, huh? Balls. Who said a guy of eighteen, even, is still a kid? If so, why so? Especially if he wears the uniform of his Country ... the self-same uniform I have worn the most of my life, buddies, buddy-wuddies. I'll be double-goddamned if you little pissheads are going to soil it Damned and goddamned. Kids, my ass. How many more? How many ...

Terror set the men in motion. Now they were scattering in all directions, all over the room.

Someone screamed, "Call the Chinks! *Get the hell out and call them!*"

"Bug out! For Christ's Sake! *The guy's nuts!*"

A wild, furious rush for the door, but too late: Phillips' men were already there, knocking them to the floor, back into the room, sprawling, screaming...

"*Don't let one bastard out!*" Phillips roared, "*Not one!*"

Now, among them, lashing out with steel fists...

They did not defend themselves, only tried to dodge the blows, scattering this way and that, rolling, running, stumbling from one corner to the other, falling over one another.

The grim chase went on and on, but Phillips, one by one, caught up with them, pinned them, went straight for the throat, finding it, buoyed by the thrill of it, the rightness of it: under his hands, *dirty rotten life ending*. His heart clamouring wildly... The voice even screaming: *Dirty rotten life ending.*

Finally, it was all over.

Stillness. Only the fire crackling in the stove and his own heavy breathing.

He felt the exhaustion of the effort as he walked around, prodding and kicking the bodies. Short time ago, comfortably asleep, alive, dreaming. No response. In the dull, flickering light of the yellow flames, he could see them as they had fallen, twisted, utterly soundless, as he had left them...

Murmuring now, "Sleep well, sleeping beauties..."

And turning, seeing his own men, suddenly realizing: *they have been helping me...*

They were shifting around now, impatient to be going. Phillips, again surveying his work, drawled, "Yehhhhh," less by habit than fixation on a word, simple word, holding on to it, seeking a meaning beyond its essence, word briefly uttered sooner than most dead, held onto, by him, there, in the flickering, yellow night-light...

The trip back was agonizing. The wind against them was stronger than ever. Foot by foot, seeking to stay near one another, they struggled along. The distance between the sections was not really very great. But it could have been miles...

Snyder, following Jenkins, felt his breath being sucked away.

"Help me!" he attempted to scream, a whimper of it heard only by Jenkins, who turned, saw him falling, tried to help him.

Phillips fought the wind. He hated the wind. But he also loved it, for he needed it. It was something to get through, to overcome, to survive ...

... Icy bastard ice-wind. So you believe it. You believe you can lick old Phillips, bastard-wind of the North? Don't think so, don't ... tonight, maybe, though, too much ... up there in the hut we are heading for: who's waiting for us? Further up is the one where our buddies are warming their footsies ... Maybe they have, their reasons ... What the hell do I care? Tonight was a

night. WHAT A NIGHT ... reasons ... sweet Jesus reasons ... fifty out of two hundred worth a damn ... What a long way up, Jesus, what a long way up ...

Snyder was back on his feet, pulled along by Jenkins and the man behind, Williams.

It came to Phillips suddenly, gripping him: a hot stinging blow through his chest. It would not let go, and confused him. It was something bad, he knew at once, something he had never before known. Now he halted, and Jenkins bumped into him. The others stopped. Jenkins thumping against him brought back the here and now, and re-established his mission: getting back ...

"What is it?" Jenkins, right next his ear, was asking ...

He did not answer, only knowing what it was he had to do, and feeling the sickness upon him.

He pushed on.

... are they all dead are they ... how many tomorrow? From someplace they came, from somewhere conceived by a mother, who gave them her breast ... I took them away, and it felt so good, oh, so good ...

An angry flame now, shooting through him.

... I am still here. When I no longer am, then that is that ... Until then, much to do, endure ... I am sick ... Something has hit me ... But I got him.

The outline of their section's huts loomed ahead suddenly. He looked back, waving his men on ..

HER breasts, Marty noticed, were lovely. Prominent, ripe, and full. She wore no bra and her nipples were clearly outlined underneath her sweater. She started walking. He watched them moving, undulating with her movement. He was very excited, and desired her. His eyes moved to her face. And there, he saw her death ... The dream, or that part of it in which images appeared, ended. But it went on, with a voice. It spoke softly, sadly to him: *In the most perfect movements, death has its hand. Death at the breasts of a lovely women. An angry demon, black, ugly, yet fused with the beauty, with love, and seeking to overcome them, and reduce them to the one primal state. Death in its mask of envy. Jealousy. Hate. Cruelty. Subtle forms. Evasiveness. Denial, prime servant of hell itself. Death, always, intruding, stealthily, unseen, until the moment it strikes home, suddenly, relentlessly. Death-devil, donning the Devil's mask. Any minute, it can happen any minute. In the instant of Cruelty, it is happening ...* Now, Ching's voice came to him. He could not make out the words, but he knew they were reassuring. And then, his own: *You take advantage of the death inside them, you play upon it, you lure them further and further away from any good thing inside them, you help them deny her, and her good breasts, you utilize and exploit the death inside them, for so many are its masks, Ching, oh so many ...*

He was awake, suddenly, light in his eyes, the bright light of a new day pouring in, reflected from the snow, whiteness intensified ... Ching was sitting beside him, eating.

... chopsticks, old Ching. When I get back, yes, there, when I get back ... because I know you do your best, I'll not forget you I make things pretty rough for you now, don't I? You know I have to. Then, what has that to do with the good things

that go on between us? ...

Ching looked up, seeing that Marty was now awake.

"How long have you been looking at me?"

Marty smiled. "Bashful?"

Ching said nothing, only continued eating.

"O.K. Long enough to see you're having a good meal"

Ching, rising, "I'll get you some."

... good man, good old Ching ...

He watched him lay his bowl down, and go off to do just that.

He looked around. Kowatski was sleeping, to his right. Lying next to him was Moriarity. Across the way, Hopkins ...

... and down there...

Suddenly remembering, knowing, he felt sick and ashamed.

... What the hell can I do? ...

... Ching-food, soon in my belly ...

There was much activity among the soldiers. Ching returned with a steaming bowl. He was not smiling.

... it smells so good ... hope I'll see the cook some day ...

Ching was speaking, solemnly, "Things have taken a turn for the worse. Big trouble last night. I don't know what I can do. Can you help me? Leniency can go so far. We may have reached that limit."

Marty kept on pushing the food into his mouth. It was so delicious. He waited to hear the rest, the Big Trouble.

It came.

"Slater is dead ... And six others."

Movement of food to mouth stopped. Eyes upon Ching. Then, he said, slowly, "In that storm?"

"Yes."

"See? It must have been there, someone *right there*."

He was astonished at Phillips' exploit.

Ching, annoyed, eyes flat, looked at him. "I don't think so." He began to move food to his mouth once again.

"Who, then? Who do you think so?" between mouthfuls.

"One of us? One of those poor bastards you got freezing to death in the huts? Get off it, Chingo!"

And then, "Seven, huh? How many up here? You check that? How many? You bastard you!"

Ching ignored this. "Of course it is one of you. Of course."

"How many left this morning, bastard?"

No answer.

"How many?"

At last, "Quite a few."

"How many?"

No answer.

"C'mon, you civilized bastard you, *how many?*"

Now Ching said, "You're carrying this too far. Why? I don't enjoy seeing men suffer! I am *not* a savage!"

"Just a saint?"

"No need to bring religion into this."

"I wasn't thinking of that."

"Why the hell don't you stop playing around? You know damn well who you're after. I sure as hell don't. Get him! Call this whole goddamn farce off, before you've murdered all these guys. You goddamn hypocrite!"

Ching was shocked.

"I am not, certainly *not*, a hypocrite!"

"Then get on the fuckin' ball! Help those guys! Give them heat, clothing—food—"

"Don't scream at me!"

"Go fuck yourself!"

"I'll have you thrown out!"

"What the hell do I care?"

They quieted down. Ching turned away for a long while. Marty finished eating.

At last, Marty said, quietly, "What the hell do I care who it is, anyway? I only want to get back. You see that? I just don't give a damn. Not one."

A priest-voice answered him, "I think you do."

"Not a damn."

"Oh, yes."

"Balls."

"No balls."

"Nobody up here cares a rap. Your boys dug their own graves the day they sold their souls to you. And none of us give a damn. Not one damn."

"You're protecting someone. You know who it is."

He put the bowl to one side. He looked directly at Ching, a long time. .

"You bring me delicious food. You make me warm. And now you call me a liar. That's bad. Real bad, on top of everything else ..."

"*You* are bad. You sit there and accept all these things and proceed to lie right in my face."

"Wrong. So wrong."

"Right to my face. You lie, right to my face "

PHILLIPS lay on the floor, near the stove. Harry was bending over him. Those who had gone with him were nearby. Their buddies worked on them, massaging, rubbing, keeping the circulation going, seeking to check the frostbite. And then, feeding them, as best they could.

Through the awful weariness upon him, enclosing him in a cocoon of bizarre sounds and images, narrowing his perception to only what appeared directly before him and the things reaching out from within him, he tried to reach Harry with his voice, trying once, twice, finally succeeding.

“—better—lot better—”

These were the first words spoken by him since getting back, and Harry felt good, knowing he had helped him. But there was something Phillips was sure to want to know, and so he murmured to him, “The others are doing pretty well.”

“Good—good man—good—”

Now, now he could, and did, surrender, the weariness closing in, the man before him fading, shadows thrusting themselves between him and out there, shadows building, swirling all around, taking him, enfolding him ...

... She was before him, her eyes upon him.

— *With my bare hands* ...

The face there, quietly, the haunting face, before him.

— *Did you hear?*

— *Yes, I heard.*

— *With my bare hands* ...

The white face, haunting face, before him ...

Fading ..

Was fading .

Now, other voices, burning voices, rising, swarming, within him ...

GREAT commotion in the room. Guards were scurrying to and fro. Shouting ...

"Where are they going, Ching?"

He would answer that. He was so sure he would answer that. *Ching loves me. He will answer that.*

"I don't know."

"You don't? You really don't?"

Ching stared and stared.

"The Section Commander controls the troops. In fact, he controls everything up here."

"Yes, oh yes, Ching."

"It most likely has to do with last night's happenings."

"Yes."

Ching turned away a moment. He exchanged a few words with someone, an officer perhaps, in his own tongue.

"What are they going to do?"

"Don't worry. Are you still worried?"

"Yes."

"You don't trust me."

"You said the Section Commander controls the troops--"

"Yes—" Smiling eyes reaching for him.

"—but I can't stand idly by—"

Marty believed it.

"What are they going to do?"

"Just give them all a chance, that's all."

"A chance? To do what?"

"To come to their senses."

"How can they do that?"

Ching would not answer.

"How can they do that?" he repeated, digging into him.

Ching answered at last. "Nothing very drastic."

"What? Exactly what?"

"Frankly, I'm not sure."

"Then why did you just tell me—"

"And I mean it." Pause. "Why can't you trust me?"

Pique. Then, "We really must find out. It's become so embarrassing. We must put an end to it. It's been going on for some time—and now—last night ..." He sighed. "Slater was a very valuable man to us."

Passing that to him, pausing, and then, "True, we shall soon find another—"

Another ...

"—but it takes time. Meanwhile, many of the students are disturbed and distracted, their work suffers—"

Earnestly, Ching tapped with his finger on the floor. "We have suffered a setback. Understand that. You must really understand that and recognize the vital importance of this programme. You must try to see that. We are not savages. You know that—"

"Bastards—"

"Nonsense."

"Bastards. Devils. You play hell with their weakness. If they are bad in their weakness, you are worse, by taking advantage of it. You turn them from anything good they may have inside them."

Ching answered swiftly, "That's where you're wrong. They have nothing good inside them. Later, after they have studied, worked hard, understood certain truths, perhaps, then, yes, Listen, there is absolutely nothing inside them worthwhile—shallow, hollow, infantile, that's it. We teach them about Life. It is our duty. Those who know about Life must teach those who don't. Otherwise, all is lost. We return to barbarism. We decay. Is not that happening to your country today? Your country, the world, will be grateful to us one day. What have

other nations done with POWs? Shot them. Locked them away. Ignored them. Treated them like dirt. Enslaved them. Reduced them to animals. Not we. We care for all men, and we are especially concerned with the gross, frightening immaturity of your men. Their profound ignorance. Their lack of any order, foundation within themselves. Their characterlessness. Yes. That is why we persevere. It is our duty. Because your world is made up of millions just like them. And if we can reach just these few, just these! Oh, if we could only educate all peoples, the great uninformed foolish adolescent irresponsible masses! Particularly in your country. Teeming with millions of child-like, neurotic creatures—you would be able to stay at home, with your family, and lead a happy life. What are you doing here? Think about that. How absurd! Thousands, each week, die, just a few hundred miles south of here. Why? Who are they? Names? Numbers? Yes, but also human beings. Think about that."

Marty did.

But he was more impressed by Ching's delivery. It was a masterpiece. He had a sudden impulse to applaud. It was automatic, like the days in the school auditorium when the Congressman came around to make a speech ...

"You don't say anything."

Which was true.

Finally Marty said. "Balls. You play the devil with them. Get them into trouble. You know what will happen to them when they get back? You know what's going on?"

"So what? Why shouldn't 'something happen to them?' Isn't it about time something did?"

Smiling. Yes, Ching was smiling ... *old Ching, dear old Ching. Smile pretty for me, Ching-wing ...*

"What about the trouble you make for them *inside*, Ching?"

The reply came quickly: "Not true. That started long ago. That was brought here with them. That is what we seek to help

them with. You want the word? *Cure them—*"

"Why not your own people? *Cure them—*"

No reply this time. Ching only sat there, tilted slightly, almost jauntily, back, looking long at his man.

And outside, far-off somewhere, commotion. It reached them, shouts and other noises, through the bitter cold morning air.

Long silence. Listening. No movement.

"Don't you want to take a look?"

Ching: "What for?"

Marty, slapping his knees, "That's exactly what I mean! Jesus Christ, Ching, what the hell do you *think for?*"

Unruffled, Ching took a cigarette now, lit up and offered one to the man, there, before him.

"You still don't trust me," he said sadly.

Accept, and light up, puff the good smoke, blue clouds billowing ...

... fade and return. Here we go again, hang on, dear old Ching, by the wong dong, has me by the wong dong, dear old Ching a ling and no getting round it, round and round so hang on and know he has this way of getting you, inside you, smart old bastard devil Chingo wingo dingo ...

A long silence.

Warmth.

Cigarette smoke.

Floating.

Kindly Ching: "Do you remember, that day, when you first came here?"

... oh Ching ward doctor ..

"I do."

... we march to the altar ...

"The winds were not so cold then, the summer was still with us, the air was warm, the sun—"

... poetic rhapsody .. musical accompaniment ... my Ching ..

"So what?"

"Think a minute. What could have been done with you?"

"Keerist, what hasn't been done with me?"

...*oh a one oh Chingo* ...

"Look at your buddies—"

He did.

"—sleeping there—does anyone disturb them?"

The noises outside were coming to them louder, ever louder ...

"Take a look, Ching—"

He sighed, "You just don't trust me—not at all—don't trust me—"

"A look—*take a look*—Ching—"

The noises were now voices—Chinese, American ...

The fat little commander stood up on the platform. Before him, clad only in rags, the men stood in the cold. Freezing cold. They did their best to keep warm, moving this way and that, beating their hands, tucking them under their armpits, between their legs, crowding in on one another until they were a solid mass, and looked like some newly evolved organism, there, on the snow-covered playing-field-parade-ground whatever. The wind abated. Mercifully, somewhere else it had gone. The guards moved among the mass-thing, trying to wedge it apart, but were met with curses, shouts, groans, and a massive resistance, even though they clubbed with rifle butts, shoved and kicked. At last, the fat commander called them off and began his speech. The high, sharp, shrieking voice split the cold air, rising, assaulting, and spending itself against the massed resistance below.

The interpreter squawked at the top of his voice, but not one word was heard. Neither side seemed to tire, even after an hour of this. Finally, the commander, gesticulating wildly, his arms thrashing the air, jumped up and down, no longer speaking, only screaming at the top of his voice, or what was by now left of it. The interpreter soon joined him, and the men below suddenly became silent, turning their eyes upward to view the spectacle.

The interpreter, seeing his chance, stopped leaping and gushed a stream of mad English:

"All fuckin' guys *listen!* Youse pretty here, have it fuckin' *easy!* *Yeh man!* Gravy train fat cats *ball!* *Yehhhh!* Well, youse all guys better fast squawk and fast to the Commander I mean *Yehhhh* Jesus Christ, *man!* Son bitch *about the son bitch* listen *man!* What last night *Yehhhh* down there *man* fucked up the *works man!* You know down fuckin' guys *Slater* Commander better! *I ain't kiddin' kiddin'!* Guys Slater man Commander better! *Cats! Listen! Attention!* See? *See that?* Wot I mena *mean?* Meana Commander **HEY!"**

Desperately, he tried to get more in, firing rapid bursts, but they were all lost now in the roar surging up and drowning him.

The commander stopped his antics momentarily to hear this new thing. But he soon took them up again, even more vigorously. The noise did not cease while the men continued to stare up at the platform at the little fat man who, becoming more and more furious, lost all control suddenly, springing from the platform, actually rising first as if popped out of a box. He fell, landing flat on his face in a huge bank of snow, rescued by a squad of soldiers, guffaws from the mass-thing rising. And now, all white, a rifle in his hands, he began slamming at the men, clubbing them, ~~scre~~reeching. Soon all the guards rushed in, and more, running from their quarters, clubbing. The men fighting back, a general riot was in swing, hell's bells ringing, many men falling, on both sides ...

Phillips awoke, abruptly breaking the surface of the dark ocean within. A rude shock. His heart was thumping in his chest, about to detonate, pumping blood madly ...

Someone was saying, "Easy—now—there—easy—"

The violence of his dream within him, and still seeming with him, though now, out there, he heard it, or part of it ...

Searching for his voice.

"What's—what's—"

"Easy—"

"—all—that—noise—"

Harry murmured, "Porky—Speech."

Jenkins: "Not having much luck—seems—"

He grunted. A fever was burning within him.

Harry handed him a bowl of soup and helped him raise it to his lips, Jenkins holding his head ...

"What—what for—what—"

"Don't know." Harry said.

"You?"

"No," Jenkins said, grinning.

It seemed to him they were grinning. And now, he felt himself grinning.

"How come you—we—"

"Didn't find us."

"What?"

"No kiddin'. Walked right by, outside—"

"That right?"

"Honest to God right, honest—"

"Jesus—"

He looked at them. *Most faithful, and smartest. Best of them all, even now, when I know, yes, I know, the fever will take me, and I will be disintegrated, and strewn over the frozen hell of this godsucken country, my guts, bones, all over the place ... they will stay, these two, and follow me to the very gates of hell itself, which, now, here, I don't want, I can't want ...*

"Listen—"

He made a move, trying to get to his feet. He floated. The burning was worse, a hammer in his head beating him back ...

A roaring ... looking in at me through the gates roasting in Hell, as I lie here ... Shellfire, grenades. Men rushing, falling ... Christ, only you, standing outside those gates and calling to me, trying, hoping to reach me, only you know the full curse upon me ..

MORIARITY watched Ching and Marty. Then he closed his eyes tight, floating in the luxury of these last few days. Or dream. He still wasn't sure. He opened his eyes. Still there. But he wasn't sure. He sneaked a look around, moving his eyes until he thought they would fall out of their sockets, moving his head now, ever so slightly, slowly, as if the two absorbed in that unending conversation would ever have noticed or cared even if they had noticed. He saw Kowatski. Still asleep. At least it looked that way. He moved his head back very slowly. He felt so clever. *They never even saw me. What the hell are they gabbing about, laughing about? Jesus, why don't they get married!*

He felt very hungry ... *If I move and sit up and walk over to Ching and get close to him and wag my tail like a dog would, he sure as hell will get me somethin'. Sounds like those poor freezin' bastards are getting the shit kicked out of them. Sweet Jesus! Because the floor is warm and the blanket warm and two of you together could really get warm. Be a good way to do it here ...*

Kowatski was awake ... *What's that dumb bastard lookin' at? ... He felt good calling Moriarity a dumb bastard. Or anyone he really liked and trusted. That was the first thing that came to his mind the minute he liked someone. He would feel a gush of warmth, swarming up and melting the hate and fear inside him. He would think: the dumb bastard. Because that was what he thought of himself. And he liked himself. And most people he liked tended to be like himself. So they must be dumb bastards. It followed inevitably.* Fearsome logic. In Pittsburgh, where he had a job at Republic, he even got to thinking of the furnace as a dumb bastard. It was, too. If

ever anything in this wide world was a dumb bastard, buddy, it was a blast furnace. He said that to himself over and over. He loved hearing himself say it. *Why don't I get up?* He thought hard about his project: *Run for the door, knock the crumby guard on his ass, get down there with the rest of those poor guys, where I belong ...* He thought hard about it. The movements he would have to make. Raising himself off the floor. Pushing aside the blanket. Getting to his feet. Pulling the blanket off dumb bastard Moriarity. Dragging him to his feet, explaining everything quickly, then, going, man, going. But then he sank under it: *What for? to freeze with the rest of 'em?* He thought of his wife Dolly. When he got home from work she would have supper ready for him and they would talk like two hens about relatives and neighbours, about the TV repairman, and the milkman, the one who thought he looked like Clark Gable ... *What if he did, Honey? Can't a guy believe he looks like Gable? He's got the moustache anyway ...* Junior was a little smart guy today ... baseball all the time, baseball ... Lousy Pirates ... later, in the night, finding her breasts, cupping them, fondling them, large, firm-nippled breasts ... in his mouth, swearing that was milk coming out of them and into him, his tongue running over them feeling the milk ... *Jesus, honey, when you're pregnant then your titties honey will have milk and you're gonna give me some oh are you honey are you ...* Sweetheart, she would tell him, now, God, love me, take it now, oh honey, take it now, oh honey, take them, let me have you you oh God, you can have anything—give me all of you oh honey ... and at last, when it was over, she lay back, pink, hot, breathing warmly to him, and he thought she was a rose, a rose all open for him for ... *if I was to feel of my wife's titties I would have only to turn over in the night and take them in my hands for they were always there for me and she will give them to me any time for they are there for me ... and if I want to feel her pussy, any old time in the night, I can do that, yes I can ... I like to feel it in the night*

... *wet warm* ... He was drifting ... his wife faded ... drifting ...

He thought of *them*, outside ... He was sweating, as he lay there, and it nagged him to go back to the plan. He went over it again ... he pictured raising himself—that would be the hardest part—his head, mainly, so heavy, paralyzed ... *feels like* ... getting the head off the floor ... then the torso ... up ... up ... the blankets off ... *But raising the head! Jesus!...*

Dolly, wait Baby, I'm comin' back! He saw her, suddenly, all of her, before him. He was in agony, great hot tears massing ... He fought them, turning to Moriarity ... *Look at the dumb bastard! Sneaking a look at Marty and Ching ... Keerist! Who the hell cares? Get up and piss on the floor, dumb bastard, and they wouldn't care. Go on, piss on the floor! ...*

EVEN on the warmest days you can get cold if you lie still in the shade, perfectly still a long time. And how close was that to death?

Marty heard them. The noise from outdoors reached him, hurting him: a part of him. Another talked on and on. And listened.

... dear old Ching. Why aren't you out there, old Ching? Why do you stay here? What if they make a break for this place and get us, tear us to pieces, old Ching? How do you ...

"How long did you actually live there?" He heard his own voice.

Ching was lighting another one.

... Jesus ... do you smoke in your sleep Ching your lungs Ching ...

"Six years."

"Going to school all the time?"

Cigarette offered "No, thanks. Jesus, *no thanks*

"Yes."

"Where?"

Rings expanding

"Columbia."

"Ph.D.?"

"Yes." Coyly.

"In what?"

"History, Philosophy "

Smiling pause.

"Education --" Ching went on

"Literature—" "

"All of them?"

"Yes," he said blandly.

"You're a liar!"

"You?"

"You."

Happily smiling.

"Then why didn't you stay?"

"Why should I? My job was over here. My country --"

Mocking him, "Your country—"

Ching-Feathers could sometimes be ruffled. If ever so slightly.

"You might think that cute. Have you the right, though?"

Have you lived there? Do you know what's going on?"

Marty was so pleased.

. oh Ching-ruffled

fuffled

buffled ...

"No you do not! So--who has the right?"

He wanted no answer, now in full flight.

"Would you like to hear about *your* country?"

"Heard it," Marty said dryly.

"From one who saw clearly. because he was not part of it, and therefore open-eyed?"

Marty felt a pain, and tried to relax. He sought the shelter designed to protect him from these minor crucifixions

oh, Ching, what I put up with ...

. martyr martyr ...

He was chuckling, within. at that one ...

"Let us start with the most obvious, most appalling evil: the ignorance—and I do mean ignorance—of the masses."

... applaud ...

"They haven't the slightest idea what reality is. They are buried under the avalanche of mass entertainment—infantile or at best adolescent to the extreme—and mass advertisement—corrupt, cynical as can be. Ad-Mass, someone has called it. The Ad-Mass culture, seduced by itself, wallowing in profound, dangerous Ignorance. The myth is: Free Individuals, Liberty.

The reality is: most tyrannized people in the world. Suffocated by Ad-Mass. They know nothing, feel nothing, think nothing about the Truths of Life. Colossally crude minds. Look at your educational system. I've studied it closely. A farce, completely. Most glaringly, on the secondary school level. Have you met some of the people who sit on your school boards? But these are surface troubles. The real trouble is much deeper: Infantile character structure, marked by masked envy and greed—endless shades—and varieties—a refusal to learn—I mean *really* learn—an enormous contempt for anything smacking of real knowledge—or genuine insight. A stubborn refusal to take in anything really good; a perpetual, absurd attempt to remain the adolescent; to evade and deny growth, aging, maturation, death. Note the dress of middle-aged people. Distinguishable from adolescents? Note their thoughts, behaviour, interests—what examples are they for the younger ones?"

He paused. Marty tried to get more comfortable. He was falling asleep, but the voice kept boring in ...

He mumbled, "When do I clap ..."

"That's number one—"

"Number one ..."

"Yes. An infantile, slothful, ignorant mass ... Physical acquisitiveness, the 'rat race'—the Barracuda waters—*these* do not constitute vigour—only greed, sadism and masked envy, ... looking for the easy way out. Ad-Mass tyranny. Sawdust in their veins—"

Stumbling over words, "Poet said that—once—"

"And he was right. Yes, I quote that with pride. I quote any truth with pride."

"That's—one—number one?"

"Yes—"

"Let me know when you get to ten. Bye ..."

"Now, the second: the criminal irresponsibility of your leaders,

your educators. Those who should know better, who should pick the masses up by the seats of their pants and make real people out of them. Why isn't it done? Two reasons, basically: a good many of them are like that themselves; and then, it suits the capitalist bosses to keep the masses that way. I'm talking about your country's real bosses: the Big Corporation heads. As for your political leaders—they are mostly as bad as those who elect them, and they are at the mercy of their electors. Be Nice to the Animals—they elect us. This is the philosophy of the politicians. Weak, gutless. That is the real tragedy of your country: the impotence of your leadership. That is why you will fall apart at the seams, and in not so far off a time as you might think—"

He paused, puffed on his cigarette. Marty noticed that Moriarity was propped up on an elbow, listening ...

"And now the third: the cannibalistic economic system, where, mark you, in a country with fantastic natural resources, and an economy functioning in high gear, the system still has *no jobs* for at least three million, sometimes four, five million. Essential services are starved for money. Example: schools, social services. Medicine is one cruel exploitation—your A.M.A. the most reactionary body of healers in the world—the shame of it—my heavens! Farmers are paid not to grow food, huge surpluses rot in warehouses—while two thirds of the world is living on the starvation borderline. The great seducers thrive: the Ad-Mass boys, the great corrupters, the great 'creators' of your chromium-plated, but inwardly rotten, culture—"

He drew on his cigarette. More smoke in the air.

"There are those in your country who realise these things—and much more. They know you are a ship with no rudder. I knew them at Columbia. They start out with high hopes and humane ideas and plans. But, soon, the all-pervading rottenness gets them too, and in the end they surrender to it—this is called 'compromise.' Finally, they become like all the rest, and wallow

in it. You can see this phenomenon again and again—"

He paused. Marty cocked an eye, cautiously ...

"Oh—yes—very important: tremendous armaments expenditure props the whole thing up. Three-quarters of your government's budget for arms. Think of the millions on the unemployment heap if this suddenly should halt! For instance: what would you do?"

"Dunno—Ching—"

... *sleep* ... *mercy* ...

"One could go on for hours—"

... *One* ...

"No foundation—all the way down the line—"

"Saroyan?" Brightly ...

"Right. It sums it up in a nutshell."

... *shell* ...

"Some of the Columbia 'liberals' used to call him 'a great comic writer.' Good Heavens! Comic!" Ching actually shuddered.

"Righto, Chingo—in a nutshell—"

"No foundation—no—"

Bliss.

"What apt phrases your language abounds in!"

... *bounds* ...

... *hounds* ...

Marty listened for the noises from out there. Less, now, it seemed ...

"People, Chingo. Systems schmistems, Ching-Ding .. What happens when everybody in your country gets rich?"

"Ah, ha! You think we will become like you! That's where you're wrong. We seek to put Foundation in our people. Our society will be organic, unified—it will have a purpose—a helm—it will not be a raging, bad, cannibal mass-mess, such as yours. We seek to make *all* our people a part of our new society, and to feel a genuine love for it ... and to give them all the chance to

learn about the Truths of Life."

Pause ... *lighting another one ... my God ...*

"We follow the laws of the Universe. Unity. Ever and over towards unity. Integration. Intelligent planning. Full use of all material and human resources. No greedy, petty scrambles for power and fortune. No rat races. No shameful waste and unconcern about less fortunate peoples. No artificial prosperity. No sleeping on the job—the real job: *learning about Life*. We seek to fulfil Nature's laws and purposes. Inevitably, we shall succeed. It is in the scheme of things. Once discovered, and taken, the Way cannot ever be turned from—once one spark hits one man's mind a conflagration is not far off—spreading rapidly—impossible to put out—Nature sees to that—we follow Nature—her laws are good, life-giving. Man's duty is to fulfil them. for he alone has the evolved intelligence—he is not here just to fill his gut—"

"Righto, oh ho. What happens, though, when all gets blown up?"

"Oh, no, you won't. You'd like to, but you won't—"

"Good luck to you—" Marty said dryly ... falling asleep . .

Hearing the roaring out there. Minutes turning themselves over, ominously, running into one another and tumbling down* the long violent slopes of time, pausing, only, through dawns yet unknown.

Dawn.

There was Ching, across from him, looking at him.

Cigarettes. For Marty, and looking over at him, seeing him awake, one for Moriarity ...

"Thanks, ol' buddy."

"What gets you up so early, buddy?" Marty asked.

"The noise," said Moriarity.

"It's gone."

"That's what I mean. Ask Ching."

"You—"

"Ching—You gonna tell us?"

Silence.

Marty sighed: "Hes not gonna tell us."

"Not gonna—"

Ching, quietly, tender eyes looking at him, "When are *you* going to tell *me*?"

All, puffing, blue smoke, hovering ...

"You'll have to tell me ..." Kind voice, quiet voice, Ching voice ...

Ching had breakfast brought for them. Hopkins had reappeared. He sat to one side, with Kowatski.

"I'll bet they know," said Ching, enjoying his own breakfast.

"I'll bet," said Marty, smacking his lips ...

The noise had taken up again.

Ching said, "They must be very cold out there. Wouldn't you think? And why? How many left?"

"You fucker."

"Put us out there, now, black bastard."

"You know I just don't want to."

"Fucker—you—prime fucker—you ..."

• Three small smoke rings. Ching, sitting back, leaning against the wall, listening, blowing smoke rings. Marty watching him.

Moriarity went off somewhere.

A long silence was broken gently: "Because you know, and won't tell me—they freeze to death—out there—just out there ..." Pause. "—and all inside you, on your conscience, so heavy on your conscience ..."

Marty watched him, saying nothing.

Ching said, almost musing, "Your fat cars—glittering with chrome—twice the length and width they need to be—criminal waste of good material—clogging your highways—driven by madmen—committing murder on your highways—false pros-

perity—No Foundation—thundering machines—while half and more of the world starves—they build these machines—on their conscience—on yours—you own such a machine—who drives it now? If the infantilism of your people ever comes right out—explodes ...” Pausing. Sighing, “Don’t you want to learn?”

Marty answered quietly, “What for, I wonder? What good will it do me? I’m just a miner’s son. I come from a small, unknown, unknowing town. Which I wish would never change. I hate change. If only things would just stand still. Stay as they always were. But no, they don’t. I look out the window and the snow globs fall. They pile and pile around. When I get back I won’t know the place. If I get back. It won’t know me. When I think of it, of home, I don’t see much beyond my childhood. Time stopped there, right there. Dead in its tracks. That’s what I want. That’s why I talk to you. That’s all I want. I long to return to it. The hell with the rest. The hell—with—it ...”

The voice, urging him, “Why don’t you tell me?” Then adding, beseechingly, “So heavy, you know it’s so heavy, there. on your mind, on your conscience ...”

A BITTER cold dawn, ugly and grey. The wind, which had roared all night, suddenly became a whisper. Snow clouds arrived. Soon, the first flakes began to fall. After a while, they were tumbling thickly out of the sky, unending numbers of them.

Willy Coughlin stared at all this with utmost disgust. He had been born and raised in upper Mississippi, and none of this, the first real winter he had ever experienced, appealed to him. Everybody else in the hut was asleep. Soon they would be up, though. He would take roll call and check to see if they knew their lessons. That was very important. If any of them didn't know the answers in class, all hell broke loose, and he would wind up getting the shitty end of the stick, because this was his squad and he was responsible for it. He drew himself up at this thought. *I'm responsible for it, by God.* The man, though, who didn't know the answers, had a pretty rough time of it. He'd be self-criticizing for two hours, at least, and writing a good long confession, too. *If the crumby bastard could write! That's how it should be. It's those two fuckin' niggers! Krist, I wish they could write! Nigger pussy. He thought of sweet wet nigger pussy. Oh, sweet land of heaven, haint there just nothin' like sweet nigger pussy! He thought of her, the first one. He had caught her coming out of the shack. She was a juicy one. Oh how they bounced! Fresh, warm, sweet and juicy, sweet lovin', sixteen, she was. Man how I love nigger pussy! The snow came a little faster now, he noted. He thought of Joe Harris, the nigger who had gone after his sister. He chuckled, the memory vivid. Jee—sus, We Fixed him! Yooee, we fixed him! The snow again. If only the fuckin' weather wasn't so lousy! Goddamn niggers, Lord. What I have to put up with! Sonuvabitch, I can't figure out what in hell for they went and put niggers in my squad for. Only one worth*

a shit, and that's Brandon. He ain't so bad ...

His thoughts turned to other things ... The big shock everybody had when they found ol' Slater and those others done for. *Kaboom for.*

He had been pretty scared himself, wondering what the hell was coming off. But he soon saw which way the ball was bouncing. Soon came back to his senses. "I soon came back to my senses," he said, aloud, to the young blizzard, proudly, drawing himself up, as if making a report to some important superior ... *I was the first to get my squad on the ball, and anybody thinkin' it was easy is pretty damn dumb. Look at thum. That goddamn red-header was the worst. He kept sayin', not me, not me, I don't wanta wind up like 'em. But I told him, goddamnit. "I told him," he said aloud ... They'll get the guys that done it. That'll put the place back to normal. Normal, by God. Maybe it's a good thing it happened. Maybe they'll stop it now, once for all. Clean the place up. They're doin' it now. I hear the whole bunch is croakin' out in the snow. They'll get the guys that done it ... There was something troubling him though: as yet they hadn't ... Five days ... Keeerist ... Prickly twinges of annoyance ran through him. His eyes blinked hard, snapping on and squashing some bad things that were trying to push their way into him. A tune began to whirl inside his head. One of his favourites: "Guitar Boogie." It always came on, faithfully, just like a radio or juke box, whenever he started to worry too much about something, when the bad things tried to push their way into him. The music drove them off, or away, and he was free to walk on air in a very few moments, humming and jiving within, beating the rhythm within. He glowed with anticipation about what would happen to the culprits when they caught them ... *Turn the bastards over to me—to me and my boys—no nigger ever got what would be comin' to them—reactionary bastards. ... He had never heard the word, reactionary, before his life as a POW began. It was a word he was proud**

of, a word that meant much to him, and he used it with great pleasure, almost as if it were an exclusive possession, and more: he sensed himself to be very highly educated, four cuts above any of the folks back home ... *"Four cuts at least,"* he chuckled to himself, *"and I owe it all to them."* The word also made him feel hate, sincere hate, for those so labelled. He used it very effectively when he wanted to get his squad on the ball. It came up again and again in the discussion sessions... *Lousy Reactionary bastards been tryin' to fuck up the Programme for months. Months. Hired, hard lackeys of the Warmongering Capitalists. Not captured, sent here. To fuck up the Programme. You guys remember that. Remember that....* He heard himself haranguing them. He saw himself before them delivering the speech. He laughed, suddenly, feeling a surge of power telling him of his hold over them, seeing himself before them, receiving utmost respect and attention. One day, Ching had told him (smiling, patting him on the back) as they walked to the weekly conference of squad leaders. "Keep it up, your squad is good, one of the best, keep it up, keep up the good work." He would! That was really something, coming from Ching ... "Really something," he said, aloud ... *Dirty Reactionary bastards coming down here in the night and bumpin' off ol' Slater and those other poor bastards.* "They'll get them by God afd let them bring them down here to me, just let them, God, I'll slice their balls right off ..." His arm moved swiftly, violently, once, twice. He felt intense satisfaction. He was tingling within. Before him, mutilated, bleeding to death, they lay. It was as if it had been done. "Bastards," he said aloud, spitting on them. He halted, and looked around. Rivers of cold sweat were suddenly unleashed within him. The thought came back, the one nagging at him these past four days. He tried to stifle it. But the words were forming. He knew he couldn't. He braced himself ... *Somebody'll hafta start thinkin'...* He fought it, seeking to kill the last few words, but on they came... 'bout takin'--his *. He

was trembling, a strange feeling upon him, fully expecting some catastrophe to strike him dead on the spot. But it didn't. And he took heart; the final word came forth ... *place* ... Now he heard it, fully: "...bout takin' his place..." He listened, waited, nothing happened. He felt good. His old self. The music arrived, taking him ... Its rhythm stroked him, snaked all through him, the lyrics lifted him, took him from one magic isle to another, stopping briefly at each ... *Brandon. He is good. Damn good. But a nigger. Johnson. Jesus, the guy says he is trying. But he isn't with it. When I talked to Ching about it, he said, Everyone can learn, if he is not a Reactionary or lazy. No one is stupid. That's what he said. He oughta know. It is plain as hell Johnson is no Reactionary. So you're not tryin' Johnson, you bastard you* ... He looked over at him, lying there, asleep, and he felt a wave of revulsion. How he loathed him. Sleepy-eyed, soft-spoken Johnson ... *Biggest thorn in my side of the whole fuckin' squad...* He was the guy what always goofed at Question Time ... *Why couldn't they have dumped him off on someone else? Why me? Why didn't the damn Reactionaries bump him off? Why Slater? ...* Like a particle drawn to a magnet he returned to that which was pressing so hard in his mind. The music surged up, but it failed to check it. *Who is the man to take His place? The guy with most on the Ball. Most on the Ball. Handle men. Thoroughly Wised up. Know the score ..* With a supreme effort, he broke it off. He turned to the window again. A gnawing and gnashing within him. The snow was tumbling down furiously now. Huge glob-flakes hitting the ground, piling higher and higher. He stared at it, amazed, alarmed ... *The whole fuckin' sky's cavin' in! Keeeerist! Lookit it! Cover the whole building, bury us all, by nightfall. Jesus! ... Somebody got to be somebody ... If I don't put my two cents in soon, somebody else will .. I know they're waitin' only for one thing: for the bastards what done it to be nailed. Maybe they already got them.* He was again tingling with

pleasure, seeing himself clearly in Slater's shoes. *Top dog, sleeping and eating right there with the Staff. Ching, Tien, all of them ... Top dog ... Poor ol' Slater ... Jesus, imagine, the crumby bastards, they'll get 'em, they'll get what's comin' to 'em...* He whirled about suddenly. It was nothing, though his heart was thumping wildly. Somebody was up. That was all.

"Boy, you're stirrin' early," a sleepy voice said.

"Yehhh," said Coughlin, testily, eyeing him up and down.

"Lookit that come down, willya," said the man, scratching himself, yawning.

"Yehhh," said Coughlin, practically spitting on him.

The man moved away.

That's the way. They'll toe the line. Goddamn it. Keep the chatter to a minimum, short answers, one word, if possible. Less bull the more you can do with 'um. That's Brown's trouble. All he does is to bullshit with his squad, and they are the stupidest bastards around. Just about to get their asses kicked into hut Seven. Plenty of room there now. All those dumb 8-Balls croaked. You can do anything with these dumb fucks if you know how. Anything. They'd cut their mothers' belly open. Give 'um the works. See, he is already snapping it up, the dumb jerk ... Coughlin grinned, feeling supremely on top of things ... He watched the snow once again. It infuriated him. It made no sense to him ... He whirled around, suddenly hot all over, finding the man who had been standing before him a few moments back, nailing him to the spot on which he now stood open-mouthed--

"You—Listen!—name William Foster's Four Internal Contradictions 'in Capitalism. Quick—Quick—NOW!"

The man shrank before the hot fury, searching frantically for the answer ...

Finnegan woke up. There was a hell of a noise this time of morning. He stared out of the window. *For Christ's sake! The whole fuckin' sky's caved in!* He looked for the source of the

noise that had awakened him . . . It was that prick Coughlin. What the hell was he up to now? Why didn't he drop dead? How did they miss him when they got Slater? *How?*... Then he was asking himself the usual early morning questions: *What the Hell am I doin' here? Is this a nut-house? Am I nuts? Is this for real? Am I dreamin'?* . . .

From somewhere in the hut came Coughlin's voice.

"How long did you study? How long, Buddy?"

"For Christ's sake!" a voice pleaded.

"Don't Christsake me, Buddy! Just answer C'mon-
c'mon!"

... I'm no hero. Did I start the damn war? ... Automatically, Finnegan started going over today's lesson . . . Capitalism rots from the core. Did I start the damn war? Who did? I thought I knew. Why don't Uncle Sam mind his own fuckin' business? I'll bet both together did. I bet. So fuck them both. Goddamn. Goddamnit. Just let me go home to Jersey, back to the shore, oh, Jesus, the shore. The waves breakin' in on you and your girl at night there on the warm beach in the moonlight even Jesus sweet Mary. If I hafta do this to stay alive by God I'll do it. I hated the goddamn army from the first day I got in anyhow. All pricks like Coughlin run it anyhow, one way or another. Fuck them ... He rolled over and tried to shut out the noise, now much louder. He snuggled into the blanket ...

Brandon dreamed. *He was sitting on top of a log which was spinning round and around in the water. A river, wide as the Missouri, where it ran by his place. The log was spinning. But he was not. So what? Why should I be spinning just because the goddamn log is spinning? (he asked this out loud, but no one heard it over the other noise in the hut). Over on the bank, the west bank, a man stood, calling to him. He couldn't make out what he was saying. No doubt it had to do with the log. Why should he be concerned? It wasn't bothering him in any*

way. If it felt like spinning, let it spin. Let the damn thing spin. Suddenly, this could no longer be said: He was caught in the spin, whirled violently about, and thrown into the water. He was going deeper and deeper. He was drowning. He was aware of that. He was drowning. He fought desperately for breath. To rise to the surface. Break surface. He screamed, or tried to scream, his lungs smothered in water. He was in agony. He knew he was drowning. Dying ...

"Hey, Goddamn it!"

Suffocating ...

His face slammed against the log. Hot pain ...

"Wake up!"

He did ...

Coughlin was slapping him. Everybody else was sitting up. Only Finnegan lay there, his head under the blankets.

"What's—"

"Another goddamn dream, Brandon?"

"For Krist's sake!"

"What the hell's matter with you ..."

Voices, all about him ...

Coughlin, before him, his eyes boring into him, said passionately, "Name William Z. Foster's Four Internal Contradictions in Capitalism."

Brandon, under the log, still turning, suffocating, thought about it.

"Number one," he mumbled, trembling ...

Phillips dreaming ...

... Out of the mist, the greyness, so heavy upon everything, so that only vague outlines came to him, there seemed to be at least twenty of them, forming a line now, advancing steadily, disregarding the fire being poured on them from two positions now: his own, and Brown's, over on the flank. Human machinery. Perhaps the greyness was thicker there, rendering his fire useless.

As for his own—he looked around—he was alone! Where had they gone? A moment ago there. He had given the order to fire. He had heard the first rounds. He had seen dirt kicked up as the slugs hit. The greyness closed in completely now. He knew, though, they were still out there, still coming. They could see him. He was sure they could see him ... great white lights suddenly and blue clouds of smoke swirling. Crowd noises, blood noises. And one: Get up! Up! He looked at the voice. He tried to do what it said. He was on his knees pushing himself up. Someone above him. Hand waving. Slowly, laboriously he pushed himself up. Greater crowd-roaring. Someone looking into his eyes. Rubbing his gloves. Someone coming toward him. Bobbing white figure before him. Hurting him. Blue white streak taking him. Riding on a blue white streak. He tried to stop the hurting. He tried to lash out at the hurting. He heard the voice again screaming: Hang on! Just that now! Just that! He tried to do that. A bell was clanging. The roaring. He rode in the waves of the roaring ... Gone. Only the burning. Within, the terrible burning ... She was before him. He tried to speak to her. He wanted to speak to her. His voice was saying, "How did you get here?" No answer coming. Repeating, demanding, "How did you get there?" Silence. Only before him. Now the voice breaking free, surfacing, erupting from him, "How did you ..."

In the dark, awake, screaming the words. Breathing with difficulty. Heart thumping violently. A voice murmuring.

"Steady—now—there now—"

Harry, kneeling beside him ...

MARTY did not feel like sleeping. Nor did Ching. And so they talked. Hardly anyone was in the hut. Hopkins was gone. Mariarity and Kowatski were sleeping. Very still they lay, beyond the circle of light cast by the bulb hanging over the two who talked, their breathing audible during pauses in the conversation.

... I like Ching. I talk to him because I like him. I think it has been a few days now. That doesn't matter. Time has no meaning now. It's all a lie. Time has died. Something has died. I'm sure it is Time that has died. I hear no noises. If I want to I can break it off and go to sleep. He is not forcing me. We talk about everything, anything. Smart man. Been all around. Europe. What was that, about England? Nothing too good though. Scotland? "There, ah there, my boy." Oh, Chingy. He had one for all of them. Been around, and learned. Lots go around. How many learn? Southern shit never learned. They kept that shitty drawl-mind no matter where they were, or what they did. But I knew beauties up north, too. Pals in the street with me in front of Blake's house. He came running out. "Get the hell up your end of the road, Dago." Thoroughbred Amerikantzer, that one. Beauty. Good English stock. Reaching way, way back. Great-great-great-grand-cousin emptied slop pails on the Mayflower, sweet-smelling Mayflower ... Good old Ching. Damn good to me. Good man Ching. Good old. Not so old. How old? I feel like calling him old. Old buddy old Ching. Sly bastard though. He knows. Sure as hell knows. All dead. Him too. Must be. Sure as hell dead. How otherwise? Not a sound. I'll get back. Old Ching, help me get back. Ching. I will. Will. Back. Back black ...

Now, slowly, it came fully to him

... *Still out there. How many? Days.* He was sure days had passed ... **THEY ARE STILL OUT THERE ..**

"Ching --"

Reverie broken.

Looking up at him.

Slowly, quietly, "And what about them?"

Only blue smoke.

Ching tired. Mocking Ching tired.

"You know it's on my mind, Ching, you know--"

A tender answer for him. "I know"

"Well?"

"What shall I tell you?" he was sighing

Marty suddenly wanted to slap him, scratch him *Under skin irritant ...*

"What do you mean?"

"Just, oh, just that --" with a smile so precious

He burned. He wanted to put the burning onto Ching, press it onto him there, his face there, all the burning, press it

"Number one cunt Ching a ling Ching --"

Ching was aggrieved.

"I don't know why you're like this, you hot-head. Above all, your situation requires cool, rational thinking Don't you agree?"

Laughter, within.

"You don't answer --" Marty persisted

"Why should I? May I ask?"

... may I—may ...

"Because I have a right to know"

"And if you did?"

... I did ...

"What good would it do? Don't you see?"

"Who said that for me?"

Long sigh Ching.

"How long have we known each other?"

"Only centuries, Ching."

Smiling.

Silence.

No move on either's part to break it off.

Sitting now, quietly.

Time, sliding ...

... Old Ching go to hell. Fuck you Ching. You tell. You're going to tell. The telling Ching is in the telling ...

Marty was holding on. Trying to remember everything they had talked about today. *Or was it today? For God's sake, was it today?* He tried counting back, checking the long gaps: night, and day, things happening. But he did not know ... *Todays. Tomorrows. Yesterdays. Forever and ever Ching here in hell with me. Born with me. He was born with me within me. Old Ching within me. A chant.* Until the voice stopped it, saying tenderly: What was that school you went to, where was it? And he was answering, First a little school up near the Hollow, you know, *up near the woods—*

"In the woods," he said aloud.

Ching looked up.

"What?"

He was embarrassed, confused.

"Out loud—thinking out loud—" he mumbled.

Ching was looking at him, watching him, and now, tenderly, he said, "What are you thinking?"

. No more. Cunt. O cunto. If you were a woman and I were like that I'd have to hand it to you, gorgeous. You look like one with a red hot one. Red hot ... He stopped, very embarrassed at this thought. He didn't even like the word. How many guys he knew lived by that word ... *Trent Street, night. Tough guys would walk around and smash the street lights. Just take a rock, lob it up, and Ka-gone. Nobody caught them. Borough man would put new ones in. And that same night those guys would knock them out again. He and his gang got*

out of the way when they came around. They didn't want trouble. They liked to play Duck-on-a-Rock ... He lay in bed, frightened, listening to the night. Thump, thump, thump, went something. On and on. Thumpathumpdumpp. It was the radio, he decided. Next door to them (it was a double-block house) lived the Prestons. They had a radio ... There is music on the radio, and the music gets lost on its way through the wall, and only the bass fiddle gets through, that's what you hear. But a great part of him disbelieved that, utterly rejected it. Believing instead: That is your father. In his coffin, coming home from the mine where he was smashed to a pulp just a while ago. Like she always said she wanted. And he is thumping on the lid, trying to get out ... Or, that is someone thumping from the bowels of the earth, coming to get you. The Devil maybe. He would lie absolutely still, paralyzed with fear, until he could no longer bear it, and he screamed in the night for his father, who would come to him, caress him, speak softly to him, calm him. Or sometimes his sister, Lisa. Or his mother. But when she was in the hospital, and Lisa was in New York, that was the worst time: his father might be working night shift. He lay, then, all alone, listening to the night. Each new sound terrified him. The occasional car that passed in the street—a little street far from the main road—might be a hearse, bringing home his dead, smashed father. He would listen. If it stopped he held his breath and his heart thumped violently. He listened for the knock on the door. Sometimes he could not be sure if a car had stopped or not. He wanted to leap out of bed, rush to the window, see what was going on. But the region between bed and window was Hell itself. Demons, evil spirits, devils lurked there. He would not set one foot into it. One night, suddenly, he became aware that one day he would die. No one could help him. It would absolutely happen. He whimpered and trembled, snuggling deeper and deeper under the covers. The big bed was his coffin. It used to be his parents' bed. Then his mother went

to the hospital. His father had found her, just in time, in the cellar. That day, he had held him, his bristly beard cheek against his. Tears from his father's face onto his. He had no right to the bed. He felt he had stolen it, driven them from it. He drove them apart. Now he saw himself, dead, lying in the coffin-bed. He went into a cold sweat. He was trembling all over. He screamed: Mamma! Babbo! No! Please! Not me! Not me! No one answered. The night was unmoved ...

"Stop worrying, they're alright—" Ching was lulling him.

He felt of the lulling, swung to and fro in the lulling. *Sing Ching ... Sing me a lullaby Ching like she used to oh Ching how she used to nina nana ninna nanna ninn Ching Sing ...*

"No, Ching, they're all dead, Ching ..."

Close to him, the gentle voice so close to him.

"Oh, no, no ..." And then he added, "But I'll tell you who's dead—you know who's dead—"

Silence.

"—and you know who did it —"

Silence.

Watching him.

"How many, Ching?"

Earnestly, Ching leaned towards him: "If—just *If*—who's to blame?"

Quietly, "How many, Chingo?"

"Murderers," Ching, murmuring .

"There, down there—"

"Here. One name. One."

"There, Ching. Down there—"

"Oh, no, here —"

Silence.

The door opened. Icy wind burst in. Boots thumping the room. Some guards had been relieved. They were glad to be back indoors. Their voices chattered a long time. Boots off. Thumping to the floor. Then, again, after a while, all quiet.

"Murderers," said Ching ..

.. Old stuff. Ching-a-ling, old stuff

"Murderers," Ching said to him, quietly.

"Of their own men, Ching, of their own,,friend --"

"Our students, though, dear one "

oh dear one ...

"Students will quarrel, oh Ching friend Students have always quarrelled ..."

Sleep was profoundly upon him He fought it *See how I stay awake for you? See that? ...*

"You know that."

John Philip Sousa wrote the best marches of all. A voice, a rich radio voice, said that, "Stars and Stripes Forever". If you hear that played you want to run out and win the Medal of Honour. YAHOOOO THE MEDAL OF HONOUR. In the whole world the best composer of marches. March March. Drive, vitality, vigour, spirit of America, boysies Expressing it perfectly .

"Your classless society," Ching was chuckling mocking ..

"What was that, Ching?"

"Mass-envy."

"What, Ching?"

"Oh, just a thought ."

" Ha, Ching! Ha ha Ching!"

"How loudly -would you disturb them?"

Silence.

"Mass-madness . " Quietly

The two looking across the way there that separated them, under the light that enclosed them, nakedly caressing them

"How lenient we have been with you . "

"And those under the Hill, Ching?"

"They did not look after themselves-- "

"How many, Ching -how many there left - Ching- --"

That soft answer, "Murderers "

Sliding away on the long chute.

... Three cheers for the red white and ... my buddy from way back ... way ... are you there already, in hell, Ching? Hell-warden Ching ding ... "My little mouse," she was whispering, holding him, kissing him ...

Deposited by the wave, after tumbling over and over ...

"You're pretty sleepy," the voice said. "Why don't you try to sleep, then? Did she tuck you in, then?"

His own voice came from somewhere, "Want to talk to you—"

"Yes, I thought so."

... On the shore now, caressed by surf sliding, stretched full length in the sun, on the sand ...

"To tell you—" His voice droning on, somewhere, trying ... Half-open eyes seeking to settle on Ching, there, before him.

"—few things—fine talks—when you don't get stuck on this—lousy business—and—my country—my—you—let's like used to—we used to—forget about this—You'll have it on your conscience—Classless—will—Ching—they're all dead, Ching—know that you—your—on your—"

Mumbling away. Match struck. Flaring. Ching in the match glow.

Quietly, "What do you want to tell me?"

"Old Ching, few things, Ching—"

Riding the smoke, gentle voice on the smoke.

"What are they?"

"Say—I—get back—"

"Let's say that."

... "Don't you *know*?"

"Right, you'll get back."

"That's right. I'll get back."

The wave was sweeping towards him, breaking, but only just touching him ...

"Hell of a place, Ching—what will they do with me?"

"What are you going to do with yourself?"

"I'm serious."

"What do you think?"

"I don't know."

"Why should I?"

Long silence.

"Shooting the bull—sitting here—"

Ching asked, "Who is that bull, then?"

"Bull's the bull—"

"I wonder—"

"Why not? I keep awake—fighting like hell to—and you wonder—I want to talk to you—and you pull that off on me—I guess you don't want to—"

"But you know who the bull is."

"Sure maybe, goodnight, Ching, good—"

Ching was silent a moment. Then, "Shooting the bull—"

"Sure, here with you—that's pretty low to have on me—how long we been—hey—shooting the bull—when all the others froze to death out there we shooting the bull—my buddies all know that—"

"I see—"

"You see—ought to—you got me into this—where's Hopkins—where—"

"I got you into it?"

"You—"

"Think a minute—"

"Have—"

"Think—again—"

"Can't."

"Yes you can."

He fought an enormous wave.

"Same."

"Then it must be."

"The bull?"

"Yes. He scares hell out of you. That's why you have to

shoot him. A black bull, is it not? Who is the black bull? You have to shoot him. With your words you shoot him—”

Peals of laughter were suffocating him.

“What keeps me awake—Ching—”

“The black bull—”

“Don’t—you—pushing and pushing—right into me—base of my skull—pushing into—”

“That must be the bull.”

“Bull?”

“Yes.”

“I think you’re the bull—”

He stumbled and fell into the wave, tumbling over and over, as it carried him far out from shore, then back, rolling back with him, shoreward, rushing.

“Maybe—but who else—”

“Black bull—”

Sliding.

“Who else?”

“I like you—”

“More bull?”

“No—really do—really—”

“Yet you tell me so little—always teasing me—”

“But I like you—can’t you tell that—”

Waiting Ching; watching Ching, in the circle of light.

“Can’t you tell that? Just couple hours—days—months ago—when you went out—when—when was that—Kowatski—had long talk with—trying to figure out the whole thing—”

“Did you?” quietly—”

“Pretty complicated—”

“Tell me—” so kindly.

“Put you to—sleep—”

“I’ll take the chance—”

He sat there, swaying from side to side. He sought to steady himself. He forced his eyes open. A terrible tension rose up

within him. It stretched the bonds that joined the waking part to the sleeping part and threatened to break him, fragment him, completely, irreparably ...

"Well, I figured you were just the sort of guy I been looking for—all my life for—even though—I know—black bastard inside you—I see that—you see that—I been around a little bit—you *care—see—you—*"

"You're going off somewhere. What about me?"

"I told the guys—you were my best—buddy—old Ching—"

"Why?"

"I told them—"

"Why?"

"Now they're jealous—"

"Why should that be?"

"Dunno—nothing between us—"

In the ocean, roaring all about, he thought about this ...

"What else did you figure out?" Tenderly ..

"Why you—didn't stay in the States—"

"That isn't it."

"Isn't?"

"No."

"I'll be damned—"

"No. I'll tell you" •

"The bull?"

"Maybe. I'll tell you—"

"No you won't. I'm gone -bye bye Ching-- over I'm going- -right over—"

"You remembered--*everything* .. and you know I've been nice to you, damn nice to you so there's something you wanted to do for me—"

"Fighting like hell, Ching--"

"Sure. You want to—"

"Who told you that, Ching?"

Smiling Ching, lovingly smiling Ching, "You."

"I don't remember—"

"The black bull—everything—"

"No. Even now getting ready to say something. Ching, to hurt me some more, Ching—even though you do care—rope—handing it to me—yards and yards of it—rope getting around my neck and tangling me up Ching— on a stone Ching—sticking out Ching—bastard Ching—*black bastard Ching—*"

He was gone, far into the wave, swallowed up by the wave. taken far off by the wave . .

... His father was there. Black with coal dust. Home from work. Soon he would retire. Nearly sixty. Over twenty years in the mines. Womb-mine ... It had him most of the day, and sometimes the night. Soon, he would be out of it. Through much hard work and frugality he had this house and a little put away for his old age. It would not be much longer now. He came to the cellar door. Opened and entered. It was night. Early night, but dark. Spring. Just after Easter. Earth's new things stirring. He groped his way towards the light cord. His hand brushed something unfamiliar. He started. He felt further. It was hanging. Just barely, for his touch now was enough to topple it, so that it fell and hit the concrete floor with a sickening thud. Flesh thud. His heart was hammering wildly. He was terrified. Even in the darkness he knew. He lunged for the light cord. Light flooded the room, blinding him. Finally, he saw her. Just as she had fallen, she lay. Her face was turned partly towards him. Her eyes were open. Her mouth was partly open. One arm was twisted under her. A black, rushing wave seized him. He fought it. He cried out to her, hot tears choking him, calling her name again and again. bending over her, shaking her, screaming to her ..

Violently, he surfaced. A voice. caressing him .

"What is it?"

"Help me—"

"Tell me ."

"She's dead—"

"Who did it?"

"Nobody—"

"Who?"

"She did-- "

"Who?"

"She—"

"Herself?"

"Herself—"

"Who?"

"I've told you—"

"Don't you remember?"

"I've—"

"Don't you?"

"Stop it!"

"Don't you know? Don't you!"

"Stop it!"

"Do you think she took that awful decision suddenly, on the spur of the moment?"

"STOP IT!"

"Wasn't it something that took years and years--"

"No more—Don't want to hear anymore--"

" bred by your hate, your envy, year after year after year, dripping into her, taking root in her, spreading through her, all through her, overwhelming her—"

"You lie!"

"Lie?"

"YES!"

"Don't have to --don't want to --ever-- ever--I--"

"Year after year, day by day, the poison of *your* envy, *your* hate dripping into her--just as you have done with me--*your best buddy*--same way- *-very same way*..."

"NO!"

"Yes! Yes! And *keeping things from us*--"

"Stop it."

"Keeping things from me—"

"Going to—kill you—"

"Yes! Like—"

"GODDAMN DEVIL BLACK FUCKIN' BASTARD!"

Swiftly, "Yes! Now—You're telling—Right Now—You're going to tell—"

Marty was screaming, lunging for him ... then, suddenly, sobbing, and falling ... going far below ... darkness rolling over him ... the darkness ... rolling ...

... *In the coffin she lay. Quietly she lay. Marty wanted to touch her. But dreaded doing so. She was painted and powdered. She seemed alive, only asleep. So peacefully asleep. He had never seen her with make-up. She lay on her back, her hands crossed on her stomach, in a rose gown, lovely rose gown. She had never worn anything so nice when alive. When alive: The words formed in him, but they had no real meaning for him. She seemed alive. She must be alive. It was all unreal. She hardly ever went anywhere. She knew nothing of her new country. The older he got, the more she withdrew from it. Only returning more to the ancient town, back there, within herself. Isolated. Controlled. He stared and stared. She seemed to be breathing. Her chest rose and fell. Icicles ran through him. You isolated her. You controlled her. He turned away. But not for long. He came closer. The lips were drying. The lipstick peeling. Fragrance of flowers drifting to him. Around her neck would be— He smashed the thought. Flowers, roses, white ones, red ones, wreaths, cards filled the room. From whom? Names. Who knew her? Slave. Who dared know her? My own. In all the years she had learned only a few English words. He reached out, timorously. The town on the hilltop, far away, in her own, true land, which had sustained her. which she had sustained, vividly, intact, within her. That ancient*

cluster of buildings ... He wanted to touch her hand ... She had never left it ... to see what it felt like to see ... The new country, the new life, become just a horrible nightmare, from which, one glorious day, she would waken ... oh God of the past ... o Dio del passato ... Closer he came. He could not do it. He thought of the undertaker, his assistants, handling her body. He wanted to see. Where had they done it? A door, far end of room. On the second day of the wake, early in the morning, he pushed it open. Slowly. Yes. A long table. All kinds of gadgets, instruments. Benches, metal. Stainless steel. Cabinets. Bottles. Drain. Into, which her blood ... He shuddered, icy waves breaking in his veins. He was trembling. Quickly, he shut the door ... Hands on her body those hands on her body ... He walked back to her. He stopped before the coffin. Only asleep. She ... He stretched out his hand. ... I will do it ... He felt faint. Coldness upon him, all through him. Closer. Stopping just above her hand. Then, down, down, upon it. Icy-coldness hardness, deadness shocking him. He was spinning. She was dead ... Great gulf opening. It separated him from some vital part of himself. Grey gulf widening, darkening. He stared into it. Unfathomable, dark gulf. He was falling into it. all alone falling, forever, ever ...

BBROWN watched Coughlin reading out the names.

... Son of a bitch. Here I am, a Sergeant, and that lousy bum, a Corporal, in charge. How come? How the hell come? ...

He nursed his grievance, turning away slightly when his name was called, only muttering something inaudible.

"You deaf, Brown?"

... browno ... crumby ... I oughta ...

"For the last time—"

... voice like a goddamn frog and a face to match ...

... Next. I'm next. I'll bet I'm next. Always after Brown.
push Coughlin's face in . . . *God I hate him I hate him I ...*

"Listen—"

Something was burning inside of him. Something would happen. This time something would happen. He wanted to Sighing. A sigh travelling all through him .

"Lookit, buddy, snap out of it!"

Limp.

Coughlin glared at him

"Well?"

He mumbled, "O.K. I heard."

"I was—just—just thinkin'—somethin' - I--"

"Don't! Nobody asked you to! Just concentrate! Get on the Brown flipped to it ...

ball! You Texan shit! You wanta be ignorant all your life? You dumb Texan shit! Snap out of it!"

... me a Sergeant and me a Sergeant and ...

"Read page fifty-two"

Goddamn right. Asshole buddy Brown Shit, dumb Texan shit.

"HEY! PUNKO!"

Coughlin said so. He knows. Coughlin knows. Damn right he knows. Hope I don't fuck up again. Always fuckin' up. I try hard to get the stuff. Can I help it? I'm no quiz kid. Whiz quiz kid. Good ol' Coughlin. Sharp as a tack. Best man in the place. Oughter take over Slater's job. Poor ol' Slater. Rujus gives his guys kicks in the ass and balls and everything. Nothing like that here. No sir. Coughlin knows how to do it. Why he doesn't kick punkaroo Brown out, I don't know. I just don't know. Lookit that Joyboy Johnson. Aw, the poor bastard, let 'um alone. Brown's the one. Thickest, stupidest jerko I've ever known. All the jerkos are Sergeants. What a deal. Couple of months ago who woulda—where the hell was . . .

He stopped. Something was not clicking right. Gears meshing . . . Day room. I was sittin' in the Day Room, on my butt in the day room, just about to get out. Out. Then—Shit—how many more times I hafta go over it? Why couldn't the fuckin' Gooks a waited a couple more months yet? Why? Balls. Here I am. There I was. What's the fuckin' use? I'm here, ain't I? Oh, mamalooloo, I'm here! Zoom it up, boy! Speed. You can get plenty a speed outa her if you burn the hell outa her. To the left turn that to the left. That's it. No, no, dummy! That one Yeh. Now try it. Yahoooo! See? Go, go, go man, go! Whoooooooooooopeeee! Lookit them dum' cops! Hey peckheads! How ya like that, man? Cool, man, huh? Play it cool. Cool Yow! Zow! Zing! Ting! Streak it down the highway mane mano! Coughlin. Good ol' Coughlin. Kick his ass, Coughlin. Shoulda been a coach, football coach. Coulda used him at Central! Keerist, coulda used him! What a punko we had there! He acted like he was training a tiddlywink team. Tiddlywink! Tittilywink! Titty Tittlywinky Dink Team! Poor Slater Hope they get the bastards Hope a hope a Heroes Take that . . .

He spat.

Good ol' Coughlin Hope they freeze their balls off Balls

Oh Oh. Here goes. How does that first one go? Yeh. Oh, yeh. "The Triumph of World Socialism..."

Coughlin turned from Brown, took a plunge with Suthrud, and regretted it. *Lookit that 8-ball. Know what he's thinkin'? How to find a good deal. That's all. He'd sell his mother for a good deal. Right. That's right. Who's he think he's kiddin'? ... Parrot, never knows what the hell he's sayin. 8-ball first class. If I had my back turned, and nobody was around, either to see him or catch him, he'd shove a knife into it. Right into it. Really thinks he's kiddin' me too. Really does. Pullin' the ol' wool over my eyes. Yehhh ...* His thoughts veered away from Suthrud. They came back to the same persistent, gnawing thing. He could not shake it off, smash it, in any way. It irritated him now beyond anything he had ever experienced ... *If only they'd nab the bastards, Jesus, if only they'd do that ...* He stopped, as if seeking to recognize the inner figure he was addressing ... *See, if I go now—what if somebody else is already there—huh? ...* A wave of panic was building up. He squashed it, savagely ... *Nobody will. They wouldn't want them anyway, they know who's next in line. They know who's got the best squad. They know that. Even though I got idiots like this guy in it. One or two idiots. But they don't know it. 'Hell no, they don't know it. They think he's hot stuff. He always knows the answers, like a parrot. Maybe Ching knows ...* His thoughts slipped past him. They went right back to it ... *Jesus I wish they'd get him! Him? How do you know it's not the whole damn pack of them up there? Maybe. But won't be many left soon. Oughta get rid of them all. Or send them to a separate camp. On their own, far, far away. Listen, that's the first thing I'm gonna push for: send the bastards—whatever's left of 'em—to their own camp, another camp. Sure. All they are is parasites. They don't learn nothing. Not one fuckin' thing. Look at that jerk. Look at him.*

"Suthrud, you fuckin' idiot!" he snapped at him, suddenly. "Get the hell out there and dig a latrine!"

Suthrud looked at him, shocked. He whined.

"Jeez, I knew every one, Cough!"

"I know. GET THE HELL OUT THERE!"

Brandon started to say something.

"THAT'S ENOUGH OUTA YOU, BOY!" Coughlin shot at him.

Brown thought, *Son of a bitch ...*

I hope they get him ... the voice gnawed, inside Coughlin.

... I'm a kid. Just a kid, thought Thurn. Why should I worry? I got drafted, shoved in the Infantry, shipped over here, got my ass captured, why should I worry? All I gotta do so help me is play it cool. Why the hell not? Am I a fool? Play cool, stay alive, get back, and get the hell out. Why not? Who said I shouldn't? Am I a hero? Did I ask to come over here? Did I ask to go in the Army? If I'd a been smart I'd a gone in the Air Force, like the rest of my buddies. There's the deal! How many a those they got here? Ha! Real goddamn ball, I hear. Goof off four years, and then get out. Or go for twenty. Hell, twenty years sittin' on your ass, pension, free doctors, the Works! Be a fuckin' Plutocrat, like the hob-snobs! Yehhh. Lookit what I'm stuck with. Lookit. Lookit that Coughlin. What if those Heroes from up there decide to clean out our squad? Why not? Eager-Beaver Coughhead Coughlin. Hell, they're bound to. We're next on the list. Jesus! I'll get back. I'm just a kid ...

"All I wanta know is, did you study the stuff or not?"

"Sure I did, Cough," Rogers said.

"Then how come you don't know it?"

"It's hard, man."

"Hard? Better get on the fuckin' ball, buddy!"

Combs knew all the answers. So did Finnegan. Coughlin

was proud. The session wore on. He grilled them incessantly, demanding more and more of them. Finally, everybody knew the lesson.

Except Johnson.

But even he knew a few answers anyway.

... and they knew what the hell he's like. Next class we have my squad will know more than any on them. Any. Even with that dumbhead Johnson ...

They broke up around noon.

Some smoked, others lay on their mats. Class would start in about an hour.

Johnson watched Coughlin. *I know ol' Cough is about the best buddy a guy could ever hope to have 'cause he's sure tryin' to straighten me out and get me educated. Nobody could do that with me ever. Lotsa guys they think when they come up here it's gonna be a place where all they hafta do is wait for the chance to bug out. I don't wanta try that on account if ya do then it ain't so easy alla time ta find a Chinaman ta bring ya back. I tol' ol' Cough that couple days ago, he said I sure as hell was right. That was pretty good ta hear him tell me I was right. I gotta try real hard with all them queschuns and stuff he wants us all ta learn so's we can be the best of all the squads here in the place. Yessir, I sure did tell ol' Cough that, it ain't so easy alla time ta find a Chinaman ta bring ya back, no sir. So how come those guys what tried ta bug out tried it? They sure as shootin' oughta know. Here's the place and ta stray away, bug out, escape, as they calls it sometimes, that's a pretty dopey thing, 'cause what the hell, what if ya never find a Chinaman, how in hell ya supposta then get back? I sure as hell make sure I never stray too far, I stick with all the rest and keep my eye on Cough, ol' Cough. With a good buddy like Cough around there ain't much danger gettin' lost, and I gotta try and learn this stuff, all this written stuff. I gotta learn the score, Cough like he keeps tellin' us. Ma•nd Pa*

and Sis if they could see me now I know they'd be right proud, 'cause they know the score. When ya get a chance ta learn it, that's the thing, but like I keep on tellin' even all the guys, watch out and not to stray too far, 'cause in the hills ya kin get lost and then it sure is tough to find a Chinaman ta bring ya back ...

Coughlin puffed a cigarette, took his textbook, and called Johnson over to a corner of the hut, away from the others.

He spoke earnestly, quietly, to him; almost, in fact, pleasantly.

"Listen, now, let's try all this once more. O.K.?"

Johnson was distressed. But replied.

"O.K., Coughlin."

"Number one: give the reasons for the ever-deepening crisis in world capitalism."

Johnson's face was mass confusion

No answer.

"Number two: is peaceful co-existence between the two systems possible?"

Johnson shifted his weight from foot to foot. He looked about him, to the right, the left.

No answer.

"Number three: why does the Soviet Union lead the World Peace Camp?"

Johnson's face contained a hint of brightness

"Because they have the interests of all the-- They have the interests of all the--"

He stumbled, halted.

Coughlin urged him. "Go on, go on--"

"--the peoples of the-- plain peoples of the-- world--the world at--heart--"

"Right!" Coughlin whooped, thumping him on the back.

Johnson was ecstatic. But, also, apprehensive. He asked, timorously, "Number four now?"

Coughlin hesitated, then plunged.

"Number four now—" he paused, sucking in his breath. "Why is the triumph of world-socialism inevitable?"

Johnson thought about it ...

Coughlin waited,

...*Get him* Jesus oh Jesus get him...

PHILLIPS was drenched in sweat. Yet, he was cold. His heart, a thing apart, yet within him, thumped loudly. A greyish sky was visible through the window, to his left. Someone was sitting beside him. He didn't see. He didn't look. But he knew. Someone was there. Somehow, the presence came through to him. The grey sky. That was there. He was awake. He realized he was awake. He understood this. And the burning, within. And the cold. But he could move. He was alive. Which was the dream? He was sure he was awake. But a dream's power was upon him, yet unspent. It held him. It pressed down on him. He was awake. The sky was there. As was the window ... *This is a room in which I have been for many nights now how many nights. This was a prison camp. Jenkins is gone. Harry is gone. I told them to go. I told them just why they must go. And they did go. They knew they must go. For I am through. I know I am through. And they must survive. They must ...* But he sought them now. He sought the two, though he knew they had gone. He sought them, for the moment forgetting, feeling the presence. The grey light filtered into the room: there, the stove. Some bedding. Wooden boxes ... But not *the two*. *Where, then? They would return. Someone. Yes. There. Perhaps. Turn. I'll have to turn, have to look, to my right. That's where. He would be. Jenkins. Harry...* In the turning, remembering, in the turning, then, knowing ...

"Phillips."

In the grey light, dawn light, he saw him, Ching ...

Coughlin walked through the snow, textbook under his arm. Even the music and lyrics of the Boogie working full time with the rhythm could not get it out of his mind. Now, someone was coming towards him ... I wonder who that is ... The figure came closer. He did not recognize it. Then, suddenly: *Rufus!* He was nauseated.

"Hey, whaddaya say, buddy?"

... Boozehound Rufus with no booze was all smiles. Kicked the ass of anyone who gave him a hard time. Something up. On his mind ... Where was he heading?

Rufus was bursting with news. His little eyes danced in his head.

"Listen, buddy," he murmured, confidentially, "we got it made now, really made."

Coughlin's heart leaped. Then he thought. How did this punk know? How in hell—Call his bluff ...

"They got him," he said, bluntly.

Rufus' face fell four feet, the beady eyes no longer dancing, only resting there, sadly.

"How in hell did you know?"

Coughlin smiled, wisely, triumphantly. He said nothing. He looked into the face that always reminded him of a pig... *Polak up the road used to keep pigs. Eyes just like yours. Just like yours. Three, four of them, he kept. Would stand in doorway of shack and yell to them. They'd come runnin' Crazy Polak*

He turned and headed for the Headquarters building before him. Then he thought of something. He faced Rufus, who was gaping at him.

...you have to find out, find out, the whole thing's 'no good if you don't... the ...

"His buddies, too," he said, flatly.

He waited. He thought he saw the face before him drop even more. Within, he whooped: YOOEEE! GOOD DEAL! THE WHOLE FUCKIN' BUNCH! WHOLE FUCKIN' BUNCH!

He turned now (Rufus still there, in the snow, in his thick cotton great-coat and cap, looking after him) and broke into a brisk trot, heading for the building before him. He was quivering with excitement...

MAJOR James E. Jordan came from Alabama and he loved a warm climate. The only time he came close to that here in the officer Camp was at night. Then he wrapped as many blankets as he could find around his cotton-padded uniform and coat and lay on the heated floor, on his mat. Some of the others had got used to the climate. Some grew as tough as their captors in the face of it. But not Jordan. He was happy only when day was over and he could roll up in his blankets and lie in the lovely snug night... *God bless the guy that thought of this! Listen to that wind! Listen! Romans...* He would say that each night: Romans. Soon he would be back in Alabama. His wife would be there. The pain began. He hated, in general, going back to her. But there was one thing: he longed for her white, warm, soft, receptive body. A quiet voice whispered in his head: *to ram it home, ram it home...*

Tonight, though, sleep was not going to come so easily. Dear old Fenry, Lt. Col. Fenry, felt like talking. Every night he felt like talking. But tonight—he didn't seem to feel like stopping! Jordan hated talking in the dark anyway. It was embarrassing for him, downright embarrassing. Lots of the officers did it, sometimes talking away until dawn. Then, they would sleep through class the next day. And everybody caught hell. The voice returned to him: *to ram it home, ram...*

"So, what do you think, eh?"

What did I think... Jordan tried to remember what he had been talking about. It seemed to be about certain events in the Enlisted Camp. He took a plunge, hoping, after this, he would end it.

"Well, I don't know. What can you do, anyway?"

Fenry wriggled around under the blankets. He was from

Texas and also liked the warmth. But he had spent eighteen months in Newfoundland and knew a little more about the cold than Jordan. He had been commander of a small air base there.

"True. But maybe we ought to try and see if that commander down there will do something. Hell, they have no right to try the guy even. It's strictly our own business."

Major Jordan wondered what in hell he was talking about now. He snuggled deeper into the blankets.

Drawling, sleepily, he answered, "Well, you know, he was one hell of a pain to them. I hear he screwed the whole works up on 'um—" Hoping this shot would end it.

...man oh man lovely oh lovely if only he'll shut his trap now ..

Fenry said, "Did you hear he was a Major in the Reserves?"

Jordan felt hysterical laughter building up within him, waking him, fully. Somehow, he stifled it. kept it. at least, within him..

Big deal, oh, big deal ...

Then, into sleep. His wife was there. He held her. Her white belly was there. He had his hand on it. Gliding over it. Wetness. Warmness. Velvety white thighs for him. Big, lulling white breasts..

"When we get back- -if we get back- -we could be- -we might be--criticized . Sure. I know he's Army—still, we're the senior officers here—~~we~~—"

Jordan was furious ... *By God, if that isn't the limit . . . thought he was finished ... why in the hell ...*

He mumbled, "Let the Army handle it .. Raleigh there---let him—what the hell—"

He was falling off again, but he was thinking of his friend's worried face in the dark there... *What in hell is he worried about? Everybody—story—different story...*

He drifted towards sleep.

Came the voice, "Well, I think we should demand to see the guy—hell, Jim—we *could* be—criticized—"

The Major was pulled back, abruptly, from his wife's thighs

He sighed, deciding he would have to tell the Lt. Col. — now that he did know what he was talking about—just what he thought. Otherwise, no sleep tonight. He rolled over.

"Al, let's face it. He had his chance. He got himself into hot water. Maybe he even killed those GIs, like they claim. Look, are we lawyers? He *might* have." He paused, thinking: just for good measure. Then, "Besides—they'd only tell us to go to hell anyway —"

The Lt. Col. thought about this.

"But would they?" And then, "Anyhow, we ought to be on record—"

"What record?"

"—just in case—"

"Al, don't worry about it. Who's gonna have the story straight? There'll be twenty-five versions of it. Maybe more. Ever hear of anybody agreeing as to what happened in war? In *this* war? In *this* goddamned place? C'mon, Al, c'mon, buddy.. "

Ferry thought about this. Jordan pressed on.

"Besides, if the guy really killed those GIs—his own men he's sunk anyhow. What's the difference if we or the Chinks take care of him?"

He was pleased with that one, sensing a direct hit.

The Lt. Col. said, "But we don't even know that—that's just it—we ought to try and find out—at least that—"

Jordan was disgusted.

"Aw, c'mon, Al, take it easy. Let's go to sleep, huh? C'mon, there's nothin' we can do. C'mon now. We're out of the damn war. Besides—let's face it—those guys *worth* worryin' about? Remember when we were in there with 'um? Wasn't that something? Remember the march up here? Raleigh? Hell, what he tried to do, and what they did to him! Remember when he ordered them to carry their sick buddies? *Katoooeeee*. 'Don't worry about it, *buddy*, there'll be an ambulance along to pick

'um up.' Remember that one? And lots more? And aw. Jesus -we hafta go through it? You want the whole works? All again? *Bunch of fuckers, Al, dead end kids..* not worth the trouble, not worth it - you see that, Al?"

He was sick of it. He longed to sleep. He heard Captain Raleigh's voice within him *Two snipers whole company - panic...*

Fenry was quiet. He thought a long time about it.

Then, quietly, "Well Jim seems to me -whatever they're like -they're our dirty laundry- can't *all* be like that anyway--can't be--look at him--"

"Yeh-- look at him - " Jordan mumbled. "Just look- just "

He was gone, far away, deep into sleep, into his wife's waiting flesh, her white, warm body, near him, so near him

Fenry tried to get comfortable. It was hard to do. A gnawing and irritation was all through him, creeping and crawling all through him. He knew his friend had fallen asleep. This made him more disturbed. He twisted and turned in his blankets. He threw them off. Everyone seemed to be sleeping. He got up, nervous and sweating. He walked around, finally stopping before a window. He looked out at the great white snow, and saw the wind whipping it, stirring it

Captain Brennan, a medical officer, talked to his friend, Lt. Dunbar, who slept next to him

"And then?"

"They just kept it up. Sign, Sign, Sign--Confess, Confess - how long was I gone? All the while. Crazy bastards. I sure hope they lay off. Germ Warfare! Jesus!"

Dunbar, a jet pilot, had been shot down a few weeks ago.

Brennan sighed. "Well, better get some sleep now. They'll be coming back for you. Better face it. You're heading for a rough time. Just hang on. that's all, you know that."

They were silent a long while.

"And down there," Dunbar started to say.

"Don't worry about it," said the doctor.

"I hear they're falling over one another to make broadcasts—"

"Forget it."

"Some without even being asked—"

"Better sleep now..."

"Can you beat it? And I thought all those guys were pretty tough. I thought all the 8-balls were in the Air Force."

The doctor said nothing.

They lay silent a long while. Someone was moving about in the hut. Fenry, now near the window...

Dunbar said, quietly, "What about this guy—the one they caught?"

"Old fellow. Really tough. Like all those guys up there really helpful too when they used to let me circulate—"

"You think he did it?"

"Possible."

"Jesus—"

"You've got to be down there—see it with your own eyes. ."

"Jesus—"

"This is nothing—"

They lay there, listening, thinking, in the night.

Dunbar, at last, softly, "What you think they'll do with him?"

The doctor thought about this a long time.

"Try to get him to confess. Yes. That's all-important. They won't make it, but they'll try. And how they'll try. Then—who knows? Your guess is as good as mine. I hear he's pretty sick. May die on them. May give him a medal. May shoot him. Or—God help him—turn him over to —his buddies—"

"Buddies?"

"The Pros."

They were silent. Dunbar watched the Lt. Col. at the window, looking, looking into the night.

He whispered, "Friend Colonel no sleep."

The doctor was silent.

"Couldn't he—do something?"

The doctor thought about this.

"I wish he would—" he murmured.

"Maybe you—maybe we could have a talk with him--"

The doctor thought about this.

"I mean—holy smoke—a guy like that—" Dunbar mumbled

The doctor thought about this...

...Captain Holbert lay there, not quite asleep, thinking... *We were going to school in Alabama learning to be Administrative Officers. It was hot as hell. All the doors were open. Why the cheap Mothers didn't have air-conditioning I'll never know. The Instructor was up there on his stage droning on and on. Two dogs strayed into the classroom. They went up on the stage. They sniffed and snoofed around. Then they started to fuck. It was the funniest thing I'd ever seen. The whole class roared and roared. I laughed so hard my insides were all sore. On and on they went nonchalantly. The place was in an uproar. That was just what that Instructor needed to sell the junk he was teaching. Because, Selling is the thing. Backbone of the Nation. You can see what it's done for us. You can sell anything. But anything. Best job I ever had was selling soap. Sure. We made those charts jump off the wall. I could have told that Instructor: You got to work with the type of mind before you. Always. You can't change them. You got to take them as they are and work with them. I tell you, work with them...*

Captain Holbert fell asleep

GONE was the ice wind. All was still. The snow was heavy upon the earth, pressing its cold lips upon it.

Marty stood there now, and watched those who were walking across the snow to their huts. He could not move. It had been that way with him for some time now, since the day they had brought him back from the Headquarters hut. He had lain in one position for hours that day, his gaze fixed straight ahead, seeing there only the corpse within. Kowatski had helped him, gently, tenderly, speaking to him softly, feeding him, nursing him. After a few days, he had been able to get up. But his eyes stared straight ahead. He had no voice. Only, within, a very feeble, far-off one. He walked aimlessly. If he stopped, he would stand there, staring, his eyes fixing on something, on one thing, the inner dead thing. Then, if Kowatski urged him, gently, he would move. They had been given winter clothing. Fuel. The winter would not kill them. He heard the tiny voice now say it: *The winter would not kill them.* One day he heard them talking. The question the small voice had been urging him to ask was answered: of the two hundred, eighty still lived

Harry stood at the table. Phillips' table. On a piece of old paper was a sketch. He was pointing to a part of it. About him ten men were gathered. Moriarity was on his left. Jenkins, Kowatski, were nearby.

"Got it?"

They were nodding their heads. His eyes moved over them. He spoke solemnly:

"And remember: guards are doubled ..."

... Almost all across the field now. Near their huts They

would cross the thresholds and enter. Marty's eyes were upon a stranger walking from the far end of the field. They stayed on him. They followed his peculiar gait across the snow. Four men walked behind him. Marty recognized these: Chinese soldiers, carrying burp guns. The stranger stopped in the middle of the field; he looked back. Then proceeded in his peculiar gait ... *Toy in water, bobbing, up and down bobbing* ... He came closer. Now he was some ten yards from the row of huts. He stopped. So did the soldiers. Men began coming out of their huts. Marty heard a voice behind him.

"It's Coughlin."

He did not look back. He thought it might be Kowatski. But he was not sure. Only if he looked back would he be sure. But he could not.

He stared at the man, now standing there, facing those who had gathered in front of their huts. They had never seen the new leader of the Progressives. What did he want? Suddenly, momentarily, the voice came back clearly, strongly *A freak with a baby-face, skinny baby-face* ...

Carrying a package. Round package. Everybody was staring at him, quietly. The word had passed around. Most of the men were out now.

He took the package from under his arm, and the soldiers drew their guns to the ready. Now other soldiers arrived on the scene. They took up positions all around those who watched. Now he was unwrapping the package, not completely, just enough so that in the next instant, when his arm moved, sending it rolling, tumbling towards them, it easily discarded its wrapping, and he was laughing, shrieking, and they were following it, all of them, absolutely still and silent, watching it come to rest, finally, some two or three yards from them, before them ...

It was Phillips' head.

EPILOGUE

THE bartender was not very busy, for only three men sat at the bar and the glasses of beer before them were emptied infrequently. They were strangers to each other and did not speak. They drank the beer slowly, staring into the pale liquid for long moments, distorting the rings made by the bottoms of their glasses, then, slowly, lifting them to their lips again.

Only a few dim lights glowed in the small tavern, and the couple which occupied the booth in the far corner could barely be seen from the bar. They moved in dark shadows, talking softly to one another, holding close, lingering on each other's lips in long kisses, unmindful of their burning cigarettes and drinks, standing like sentinels, there, on the table . . .

Four men seated in a booth at the other end of the room were the only other customers. One of them, curly haired, blonde, filled his glass again and again from a bottle which stood before him.

"This would be a hell of a nice joint if they had a juke box and played some music and took down those crazy ornaments they got stuck on the wall," said one of them, frail, dark-haired.

"Great joint, Al, great joint. A juke box ---makes too much noise."

"Noise, hell, Joe, music—boy—that's what you need in a joint—music—", Al said, turning to the curly-haired blonde beside him.

"Sure, Al, music," Joe said, pouring another drink.

"That's what I mean, music, nothin' like it, Marty—hey—whaddaya say—tell us about music—ain't it the thing?" He turned from Joe and leaned wearily on the table, addressing the man.

Marty did not look up, only continued to stare into the small

whiskey glass, now empty. "You're drunk," he said. "So shut up. I like this joint. I want to stay in it. I want to drink slow, quiet, get drunk without even knowing it. So shut up."

Al's face twisted, but he shrugged his shoulders and poured another whiskey. He slumped back against the booth, humming a blues tune, and sipped the drink.

"The joint really dies after midnight," Joe said.

Nobody answered. He leaned across the table, upsetting an empty bottle, and spoke carefully to the man facing him.

"The joint really dies after midnight, right, Tony?" He paused. "It dies, it really dies after midnight."

Tony, dark-haired, deeply tanned, stared at him and spoke softly, "Yeh, it dies, curly-head, it dies, like a lotta things. Only drunks, and sometimes lovers, only those kind come after twelve. It dies, curly-head, it dies."

Marty turned to Tony. "Well, well, damn nice, poetic almost. Knew a kid in college once wrote poetry. Nice, damn nice "

"Go to hell," came the reply.

"You know the way, show me."

"Shut up."

Marty filled his glass and lifted it towards Tony "To the poet, Tony Marnaco, great poet of the Zulu Bar."

"Look--"

Al hummed the blues tune louder, and Tony turned away, filled his glass, and drank quickly.

"Music, Tony, that's what a joint needs. Music. I'm tellin' ya," Al said.

"Are you still here?" Marty murmured.

Joe eased across the table again

"Tony, buddy, keep talkin'--"

"About what?"

"What you was sayin' the drunks the joint dym' the lovers--"

"I forget "

"No, ya don't forget. Never. Don't kid me. Come on, tell us, come on--"

"Lay off, huh?"

"The ocean, Tony, tell us about the ocean, the way when the high tide comes bangin' in sometimes at dawn and you out there watchin' it tear into the sand and twistin' it tell us hey tell us--"

"Great thing, that high tide. Rhythm, that's what it's got, that's what it is," said Al, jazzing up the blues tune

"Lay off, Joe," said Marty, "Tony's empty, empty guts, empty head -here -fill up, Tony--"

The bottles were almost empty when the couple from the far side of the room walked past them and left. Only one man sat at the bar now, and the bartender perched on a high stool, a cigarette burning in his right hand, his left hand tucked under his chin, his eyes half-closed, blinking, wide open momentarily, closing, then opening again, halfway, falteringly ...

Al had fallen asleep in the booth. The others still drank

"Only couple drops," said Tony, "couple drops, I could count them, I could see them in there, separate, yet together, huh, together, I could see them all--"

"He's talkin' again," Joe said, "great, great. Drunk, that's what he is. Marty, goddamn drunk, and he's talkin' goddamn drunk talkin' --"

"You're loaded too," said Marty.

"Sure, why not? Everybody gets loaded on the shore, everybody gets dames to sleep with, nioney, money, whiskey, wine, dames--and Tony -damn goddamn drunk Tony- talkin' " He leaned across the table.

"Screw this guy Ricker, Tony, his ain't the only resort. Everybody wants a cook, a good cook, and you're the best, the best in the whole goddamn world "

"You're loaded," Marty said

"Al's out cold," Tony said, "seems like nothin's there, just an empty bottle, yeh, yeh, that's Al, an empty bottle, and rhythm inside it—"

"Wake him up, poet, wake him up and we'll all sing to him," Marty said. "I'm just drivin' nails in my coffin, ever' time I have a bottle a booze, I'm just"—" he sang, mumbling the lyrics

"For Christ's sake, not that! Let him sleep. What the hell," Joe said.

"What the hell," said Marty.

"Hey, Marty, let's get outa here - down to the sea tide in at three- maybe a moon," Tony said.

"Good idea," said Marty. "you going to sleep there too?"

"Huh?"

"Sleep there, you got fired, remember? You don't have a place to sleep now. Where's your stuff?"

"I dunno. Around the hotel, I guess. I'll get it tomorrow. Let's get outa here, huh? Outa here—"

"You take Al, Joe, take him to his place. Works early shift tomorrow. Needs some rest," said Marty.

"For Christ's sake!" Joe exploded, "You take Al what the hell am I, a nursemaid?"

"Don't be a bastard," said Marty.

"Bastard—hell— I'm goin' with you guys what the hell am I—a nursemaid?" He tried to stand, but he could not, and he swayed and fell into the booth again. Tony and Marty were already on their feet, unsteady, but ready to leave.

"You can come down after. Take good care of him," Marty said.

"You lousy Wop," Joe mumbled.

"Don't let them get his roll. He got paid today."

"You—lousy—"

"See you later."

Al snored. Joe's head sank slowly to the table, onto his folded arms. Soon, he was asleep.

Marty surveyed the scene.

"Well, I guess we better look after both their rolls . . ."

Tony and Marty walked into the street and turned towards the muffled roaring of the sea. The expensive night clubs had not yet closed, and the music of the tired orchestra men filtered into the night air, misty, close, but warm. A few canoes glided by in the waters of the artificial lake which ran along the street. The lake was a large one, splitting the town in half. It was dark, and quiet. The splashing of the paddles in the water and an occasional giggle were the only sounds which penetrated the lake's dark stillness.

One of the park concessions near the lake was open yet, but only a few of its novelties were in operation. The Ferris wheel, a handful of people upon it, turned slowly upward, halted momentarily, then began its descent, from the darkness at the top into the full glare of spotlights playing upon its base.

Bright lights, spaced some one hundred feet apart, glowed in the night, on the boardwalk, disclosing the great, misty mass of water particles which hurtled upward from the burst of the tide upon the beach, and then drifted, hovering, becoming part of the night air.

• The two men walked from the boardwalk to the beach.

"Let's take our shoes off, Tony, can't walk far with your shoes on in this stuff."

The high tide was not at its peak, and part of the beach was dry, the sand loosely packed, difficult to move through. They walked past the first jetty, past the great dance hall which extended over the beach, past the point where the boardwalk ended. They stopped, and stretched full length upon the sand.

"I brought something, Tony, here, have some—"

"You drink it."

"Feeling sick?"

"I dunno, I can't tell, Marty, I can't tell. Just empty, I guess

Those waves breakin' out there—stickin' out like hands in the dark—Christ—I dunno—Marty—”

Marty sat up and took a long drink. He tossed the bottle aside.

“They’re nice, damn nice, those waves,” he said.

“I can’t figure it, can’t get hold, Marty. That moon, fr’instance, what the hell’s it keep movin’ for? Why can’t it stay still?”

“It does, pretty near, the clouds move, mostly.”

“Goddamn, Marty, I feel rotten.”

“Sure, Tony, I know,” he murmured.

“Damnit, Marty, that’s all ya ever say, just a couple words in college, dintcha learn fancy words? Say some fancy words to me, talk a lot, Marty, talk a hell of a lot.”

But though he waited, only the surge of the sea filled his ear.

“Marty,” he said plaintive.

No answer. The breakers rolled more frequently now and smashed into the beach. Flat streams of salt water, breaking off from the waves, slithered up and over the sand and licked close to the two men.

Tony said, “My ol’ man, he always wanted me to go to college. The poor bastard, good thing he croaked, if he could see me now—”

“You’re a damn good cook,” said Marty.

“Good for nuthin’, empty, like ya keep sayin’, empty, empty—”

“... there is a silence where no sound may be ... in the cold grave, under the deep, deep sea, where no life may be found, which has been mute, and still must sleep profound ...”

Tony, raising himself, listened, listened, looking at his friend.

After a while, he said, “That’s nice, Marty, did ya make it up yourself?”

Marty smiled. “No.”

And Tony looked at his friend there, in the moonlight, and waited.

But nothing more came, and after a while he rolled over on

his stomach, his arms forming a cradle for his head, and he breathed heavily, like a badly injured man fighting hard for breath. Marty turned to him, mumbling softly. Tony gradually became quiet ...

Marty lay on his back, staring into the clouds racing far up.

The high tide, now at its crest, foamed brilliantly in the vacillating moonlight. The white spots of the ever-breaking waves could be seen far out towards the horizon, where a ship's lights blinked on and off, disappearing, reappearing, and, finally, sinking, beyond, out of sight ...

"Tony," he said, quietly.

"Yeh?"

"Let's go for a swim."

"Swim - those waves - they scare me - no kiddin' - like they was headed straight for ya—I dunno—"

"C'mon, you're a great swimmer."

"I'm loaded."

"What the hell."

The two men slowly undressed and walked through the edge of the surf towards the high, glistening waves.

"It's nice, damn nice - Marty c'mon!"

He was shouting gleefully, splashing up to his knees in the water. He bent his head low, outstretched his arms, and lunged into a huge breaker.

Marty stood at the surf's edge for several minutes and watched him. He was smiling. He saw him surface beyond the wave into which he had plunged. The moon played upon the sea fully now, and he saw him struggle against the strong pull of the undercurrent, ducking his head time and again, as the great, cascading breakers roared to the shore. He looked at the moon now, great, full moon, up above him. He looked out at the horizon, far out, as far as his eye could see. The smile was gone. He lunged into the water, skilfully manoeuvring among the waves, swimming away from shore with steady, powerful

strokes. The blinking lights of another ship appeared on the horizon, moving, gliding, southward, hovering momentarily above the ever-moving sea. A slowly gathering fog was moving towards shore. Inland, hotel signs filled the sky with a rainbow-like fusion of colours, at one moment many-hued, then inseparable.

The crest of the tide had passed, but the waves still bit powerfully into the shoreline, a rumbling, raucous mass of noises, sending bubbling streams high upon the beach, hissing there, then rushing back, into the churning mass of silvery water, again.

The two men were still out, but now one of them surrendered to the tug of the current and rode upon its waves, tumbling in on them, crawling ashore, dripping and exhausted. He lay on his back in the sand for a long time, breathing heavily, his eyes wide open, staring into the clouds which had once again enveloped the moon.

It seemed to him after a while that a long period of time had passed, for he no longer was short of breath, and his body had almost completely dried, and the moon was once again in view. He lifted himself to his feet and looked about. There was no one in sight on the beach, and in the sea he saw but the incessant tumbling motion of the water. He walked to the spot where they had removed their cloths, and, finding his, dressed quickly. He lingered for several minutes, but no one appeared. He started to walk along the shoreline, looking into the sea. Once again, the moon had been hidden. He could see nothing. He fell across the point marking the beginning of the jetty, but rose quickly, peering along the beach, and into the water. Suddenly, in the darkness before him, towered the stand which the life-guards used during the day. He started, and turned half-around, realizing how far he had come, moving jerkily, retracing his steps, his body beginning to tremble.

"Marty! Halllllohhh Marty!" he shouted, running across the sand.

The tide, now, had noticeably begun to ebb, and the streams of salt water fell short many times of the mark set by its peak. The sand was left smooth, free of all debris. He ran more rapidly, shouting every few steps.

"Marty—where the hell are ya? MARTY! CAN YA HEAR ME?"

In the darkness, a soft breeze took up. He listened, holding his breath. He tried to control his trembling. Suddenly, the moon emerged, brilliantly.

Shimmering now in the full moonlight, the sea rose and fell, and only its ancient voice filled his ear.

